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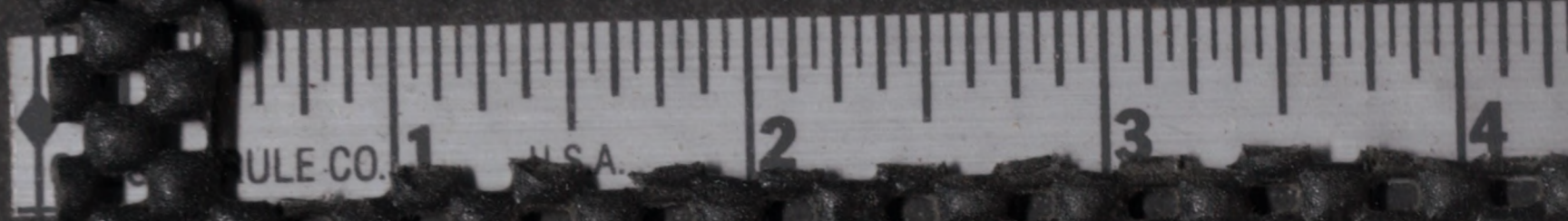
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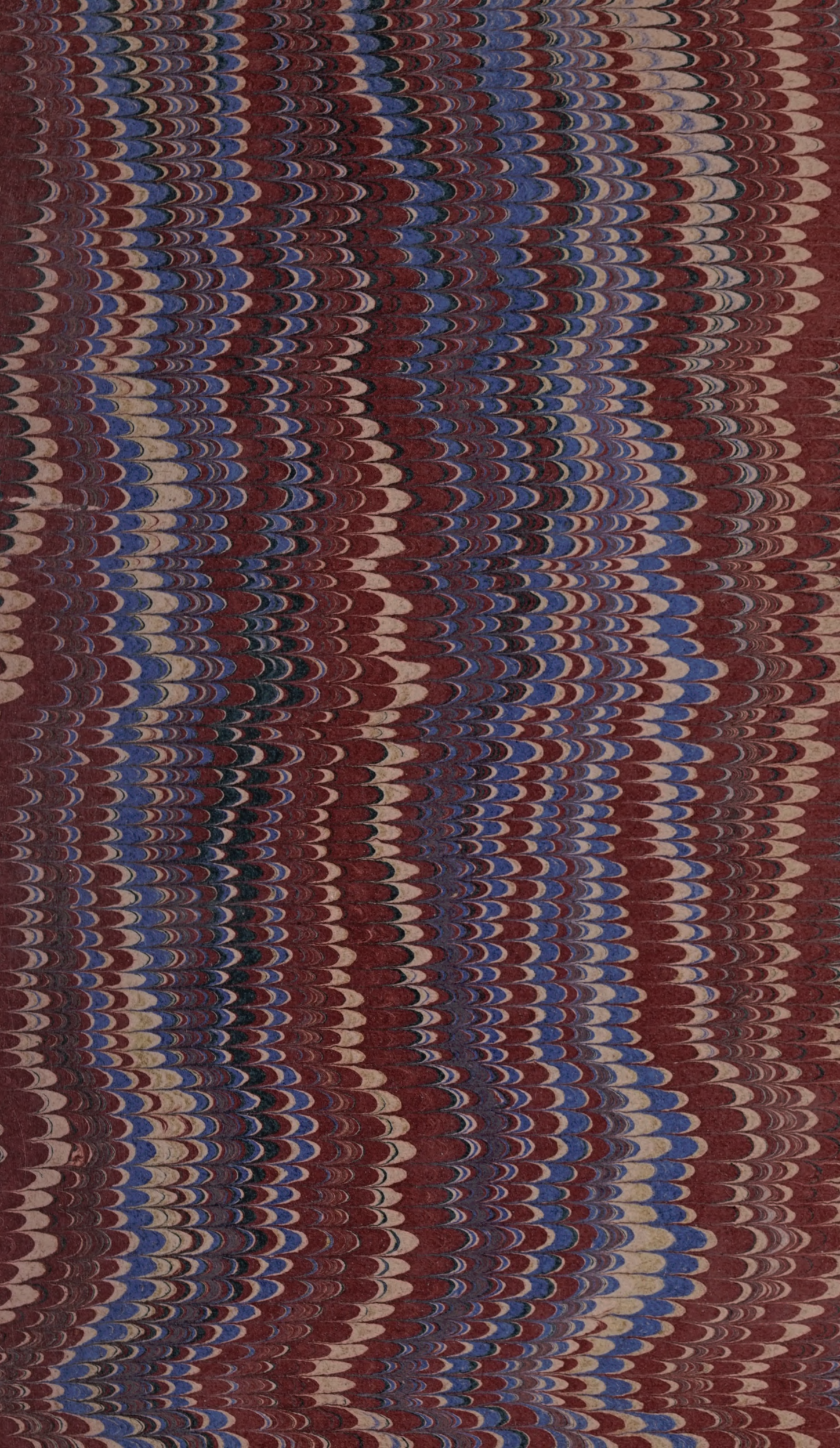
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A FAMILY FAILING

BY
HAWLEY SMART

Authorized Edition

NEW YORK
JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH ST., COR. MISSION PLACE

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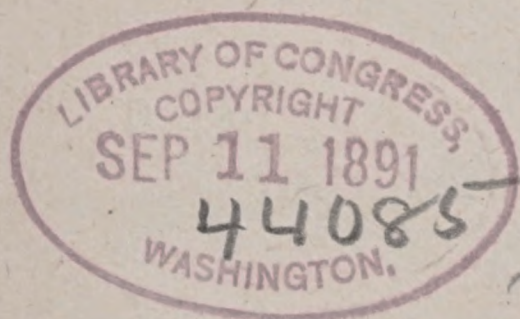
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AUTHOR OF

“LONG ODDS,” “WITHOUT LOVE OR LICENCE.”

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(1891)

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A FAMILY FAILING.

CHAPTER I.

THE SEDBERGHS OF ENDERBY.

THEY were a crotchety family, of that there could be no doubt ; it was well known in Kilmington and its neighbourhood ; but the Sedberghs had been settled in that part of the world now for many a long year, and the people were used to them. They were troubled with what their friends called the family failing, but what those who were not on terms of intimacy with them were wont to designate most irascible tempers. Doctor Radley, their regular medical attendant, would shrug his shoulders at any outburst on the part of a Sedbergh, and ask what you could expect of a race born with that hereditary taint in the blood ? Sometimes his auditors would raise their eyebrows on hearing this, and tapping their foreheads respond "How very sad. I had no idea of it." At which the doctor would burst out laughing, and say :

"Pooh, pooh ! you don't understand the Sedberghs ; they are no more mad than you are, but they all suffer from that very commonplace hereditary complaint called the gout, than which perhaps there is no greater quickener of the temper."

Eccentric they were ; the gout seemed to loom as an incubus over them all, that had to be grappled with sooner or later, but perhaps there had never been so eccentric a member of the family as Ralph Sedbergh, its present head and the owner of Enderby Hall and the adjoining manor. As an eldest son, he was possessed of a very comfortable income, and as such was enabled to indulge in crotchets of his own at will.

When we have our way to make in the world, the riding of hobby horses is apt to be found unprofitable and expensive, but when our bread, handsomely buttered, is already provided, a man may please himself about such things. John, the second brother, had entered the army and had for some years done very well in that profession, but having upon one occasion been sharply rebuked on parade by a commanding officer somewhat given to intemperate language, Captain John rather astonished that gentleman by replying volubly in the same strain. This, of course, was a thing that could not be overlooked from a military point of view—rightly or wrongly, a colonel can brook no reply upon parade, much less when it is couched in vehement terms and garnished with a few unnecessary expletives. That his commanding officer had been himself in fault saved Captain John from a Court-martial, but he received a brief intimation that he must promptly retire from Her Majesty's Service if he wished to avoid one. The Captain was a fatalist as regarded the hereditary foe of the Sedberghs; he declared that his *mal apropos* loss of temper was entirely owing to the poison lying dormant in his veins, and when, some months afterwards, he found himself laid up with a genuine attack of the complaint in question, he felt quite assured that he was not in the least responsible for his gross act of insubordination.

Aleck, the younger brother, had, like many others, betaken himself nominally to the Bar, but practically to literature. With that strange kink in the brain characteristic of his race, he declared that this latter was forced upon him, and that when the gout forms part of a man's inheritance, it is his bounden duty to seek an employment in which he can utilise it. If a man cannot turn out slashing articles and scathing reviews under such inspiration, you may depend upon it that he has either been born destitute of verjuice or that the pen of a ready writer is not in him. Aleck Sedbergh, at all events, was now well known in journalism—known as a man possessed of a biting pen and never in any lack of employment. He was doing well in his vocation, and though by no means on the way to make his fortune, had no difficulty in earning a very comfortable income. His profession, of course, chained him pretty

well to London, and his visits to Enderby were few and far between. The Hall, indeed, was not a house at which people cared much to stay. Its master was eccentric, past the run of the family generally. His crotchets were endless, and it was impossible to say under what *régime* you might be asked to live, by a confirmed hypochondriac, who was continually taking up with some new theory regarding his health, and the worst of it was, that whatever the new idea might be that seized him, he sought to impose it upon his family and guests. As his son said, "It's all very well for the governor to go ill, but, confound it! he insists upon our all being ill too; because he fancies things don't agree with him, he considers there should be 'no more cakes and ale, or ginger hot in the mouth' for anybody—one might as well try to be cheerful in a mausoleum as at the Hall. No, Doctor, solitary confinement may be unpleasant, but it's cheerful to living with my father."

Harold Sedbergh made this speech on the occasion of a brief visit to Enderby, where he had found the Squire suffering from what Dr. Radley called a severe attack of vegetarianism. That he troubled his home but seldom, was only what might have been expected. A father, with nothing really the matter with him, but consumed with a morbid anxiety about his own health, would throw a gloom over any house of which he was the owner, and good though the Kilmington shooting was, yet he invariably found that a fortnight at Enderby was as much as he could stand. And as for bringing down friends of his own to shoot with him, he shrank from the idea of exposing his father's peculiarities to a stranger's eye. Although no battle royal had ever taken place between them, Ralph Sedbergh and his son got on badly; it could hardly be otherwise. The hobbies of the elder were very exasperating, and he was autocratic—one might almost say tyrannical—in his own house. He was no niggard, and would give his guests the best of everything, but then it must be what he happened to think the best of everything at the time. It is not pleasant to have dry sherry forced upon you when you prefer claret, or to be condemned to play whist or billiards when you have come down to shoot, simply because your host has suddenly conceived the idea

that a wet jacket is pernicious to health. Ralph Sedbergh and his son more than once had been perilously near a quarrel *à outrance*, and it was greatly owing to the judicious counsels of Doctor Radley that this had been so far avoided. Harold possessed, in a modified degree, the family temper, and like most of us in our youth was keenly sensitive to ridicule. His father tried him sorely at times, and though Dr. Radley had known him from his childhood it was doubtful whether the young man would have listened so readily to his advice if it had not been for an influence that the doctor was far from suspecting. He would scarcely have found Harold so amenable if Bessie Radley had not been the prettiest girl in those parts.

"My dear boy," the doctor would say, "I'll grant you've difficult cards to play, but you must have patience. As for combating these extraordinary fads of your father's, I tell you it's impossible. I'm one of his oldest friends, and I've tried to persuade him out of them on more than one occasion, but it's hopeless. While the fit's on him he will persist in his whim of the moment, calls me and all the profession a set of charlatans, wedded to old-world theories, and knowing nothing whatever of the latest hygienic discoveries. He's an excellent constitution, there is nothing the matter with him, and when he's really ill, you will see he'll send for me at once. In the meantime you must bear with him; all quarrels are bad, quarrels between father and son worse than most, not only from a moral but from a worldly point of view. You're not down here very much, you must make the best of it when you are."

He was not down there very much, no, that's just where the shoe pinched. It was his inability to submit to his father's autocratic whims, which prevented his passing a considerable portion of his time there, that so irritated him. His sire had no right to impose his monstrous caprices on others. He wished to live in his home in a great measure, to see much of the little kingdom to which he was heir, though how much his having fallen in love with Bessie Radley had to do with all these high-flown sentiments it is hard to say.

"You must recollect," continued the doctor, "that your

father is only doing what scores of our fellow creatures are. Look at the papers, and you will see that no sooner does a ruffian from innate brutal ferocity, from lust of gain, or other vicious motives, take the life of a fellow creature, than there's a lot of idiots at once begin to argue that the murderer's will was under the domination of a stronger, in short, that he was hypnotised, and only the instrument of the real criminal. As if human nature wasn't always human nature. Hypnotism! Bosh! Don't tell me! The gout in some of its phases is far more likely to incite a man to crime or injustice than any mesmeric influences a fellow being ever possessed."

Harold Sedbergh smiled, although a little surprised at the vehemence of the doctor's harangue. But besides a profound contempt for all the practices of Mesmer and his disciples, Dr. Radley knew that the Enderby lands were not entailed, and though for the last three hundred years the eldest son had invariably succeeded his father, yet there was no saying what such a violent and eccentric man as Ralph Sedbergh might do in case of deadly quarrel with his natural heir. Harold was an only child, he had lost his mother in infancy; and the death of his wife, as the doctor well knew, had a great deal to say to the eccentricities that Ralph Sedbergh had latterly developed. He had been deeply attached to her, and her early decease had been a blow from which he had never recovered. There were no grounds for apprehending that the Squire would be guilty of such injustice, but at the same time the doctor had known of too many queer wills made by morbid and irritable people not to be aware of the unlooked-for surprises they sometimes prepare for their relations—much angry recrimination and fierce contesting of the deceased's last testament, often the result of such whimsical bequest as profiteth nothing, unless to the lawyers.

It must not be supposed that Ralph Sedbergh's fantastic whims escaped the notice or comment of his brothers. Though somewhat peculiar themselves, more especially Captain John, they were really alive to the absurdities that possessed the head of the house, and always curious with regard to his latest idiosyncrasy. John, perhaps, more so

than Aleck, which was easily accounted for. The latter was really a busy man, and perpetual work kept in check in his case the queer crotchets characteristic of the race. With Captain John it was different; on his retirement from the army, he had settled in London, and lived the life of a regular clubman. Occupation he had none, and the labours of his day were principally confined to forestalling his brother members in the rush for the evening papers, and blowing up the servants at the establishment to which he was affiliated. Between that and nursing himself through rather frequently recurring fits of gout, to which a strong taste for Burgundy and good living not a little contributed, the captain was passing the autumn of his life. His brother's whims were a source of unfailing interest to him. You see, although living in London and looking upon himself as a man about town, his life in reality was very sluggish and monotonous, and when that is the case, it is astonishing what petty incidents will interest us. Captain John delighted in catching hold of his nephew at all times, but more especially when he had been recently down to Enderby. Although he and Ralph had been on fairly good terms, yet that genuine affection usual between brothers had never existed in their case; the practical soldier had always laughed at Ralph's fanciful theories, and, let them say what they will, nobody likes much to be laughed at, still, considering what a contentious race the Sedberghs naturally were, the three brothers had always preserved, if not cordial, decorous relations to each other.

As for Harold, he entertained very different feelings with regard to his two uncles. He disliked John's domineering manner, and looked upon him besides, sad to say, as a most unmitigated bore. However, London is large, and as their lives ran in very different grooves, they did not very often come across each other. With his Uncle Aleck it was otherwise. He delighted in him, and was never better pleased than when he could entrap him to dinner, or receive a hasty note bidding him to accompany that gentleman to one of those symposia common amongst the brethren of the pen. It was now about three months since Harold had been at Enderby, and the conversation narrated above with Dr. Radley had taken place. He well-

nigh vowed then never to set foot in his father's house again, so uncomfortable had the latter made it during his short stay. But then there came a yearning to see Bessie Radley once more, and though the poet may sing that "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," experience shows that as a rule they by no means take the complaint in that modified form, but are apt rightly or wrongly to be in terrible earnest about it, and are prone to the committal of shocking absurdities while under the influence of the passion. Not only had he not seen Bessie, but he had heard nothing of her; although he had known her on and off pretty well all her life, there had been a gap in their acquaintance consequent upon school days, and it was only of late that he had met Miss Radley in the rôle of a young lady grown up and out. In fact, when he was away, Harold Sedbergh heard very little of Kilminster and its neighbourhood. His father rarely wrote to him, and his only other correspondent, Dr. Radley, was far too busy a man for letter writing.

It was not that the doctor's practice, although he had a very fair one, was so extensive, but that he was one of those active men who can brook nothing going on round the country side without his presence. Whether it was a fair or a sale, the doctor was sure to be there. He was no hunting man, but whenever the hounds met near Kilminster, the doctor and his pretty daughter were sure to turn up at the cover side. When he did put pen to paper, he was most amusing. His letters contained all the gossip of the country for miles round, told in dry humorous fashion. Nobody enjoyed them more than Harold, but they had one grave defect, they either contained no allusion to his daughter, or at the best, a brief "kind regards from my wife and Bessie."

No lover, with a temperament warmer than a fish, could appease his passion on such scanty pabulum. It was not to be thought of; he must bear his father's caprices as best he might, but run down to Enderby he must.

CHAPTER II.

HIGH PLAY.

BEFORE starting for Enderby, Harold Sedbergh received a letter from the doctor, one paragraph in which made him look rather serious.

"Fresh air," he wrote, "is no doubt an excellent thing, but when a gentleman of fifty persists in taking it in the form of draughts, at the commencement of an English spring, it is apt to be pernicious. Your father's last craze is open windows, which means there is half a gale blowing all through the house. He'll wind up by getting what it's the fashion to call a chill and complications, which means that he'll catch cold and make himself seriously ill. However, remonstrance is useless, and only puts him into a violent passion. He must just 'gang his ain gait,' as the Scotch say. You wouldn't find the Hall a pleasant place to live in just now."

"Pleasant this, to hear," muttered Harold to himself, "for a gentleman just proposing to stay there. This seems more serious than most of his fancies. Radley generally laughs at him; still, he evidently thinks he may do himself harm this time. However, there is nothing to be done that I can see. He'd kick me out of the house, probably, if I ventured to say anything. I'll go and talk it over with Uncle Aleck."

But Aleck Sedbergh, like most of his vocation, was rather a difficult man to put your finger on. His haunts were numerous and well-known, but he'd either just left, or had not looked in yet, when you enquired at them for him when you wanted to see him. If you were not in search of him he was a man you met everywhere. However, Harold was a skilled hunter when it came to tracking his uncle, and, after a few disappointments, fairly ran him to earth, and was at once warmly welcomed.

"My dear boy," said his uncle, "I'm full of business and also oppressed with hunger. The work of a fasting man is

invariably washy in quality. Come along and have some lunch, and we can have a talk while we are eating."

They accordingly proceeded to a well-known restaurant in the Strand, and, when they had given their orders and seated themselves at the table, Harold read the extract concerning his father from the doctor's letter.

"Bad, as Radley says," was Uncle Aleck's comment. "We are a queer race, and bad to drive at the best of times, but your father is a good deal queerer and more obstinate than the rest of us. Don't for Heaven's sake think I'm hinting that he is unfit to manage his own affairs, but he's odd, very odd, to say the least of it. You can't do anything, and had best keep away from Enderby. By-the-way, what the devil put it into your head to go down there in March? Was it this?" and he pointed to the letter.

"Not altogether."

Aleck Sedbergh eyed his nephew keenly as he spoke.

"Queer idea," he said, "to think of going down into the country at the end of March, when there's nothing to do. Sort of thing that would occur to one of us, and nobody else. A terrible mistake you haven't a profession of some sort. Something to do is good for every young fellow, if it's only to keep him out of mischief."

"I know," replied Harold impetuously, "and I did want to go into the Army, but my father was in such a rage because I was ploughed for my examination that he never would allow me to try again, or consent to let me get into it through the militia——"

"I know, I know," replied his uncle, "a great mistake, a great mistake, and rough upon you, very. However, I must be off now. Take my advice, and don't go near Enderby at present; you are likely to have a row with your father if you do, and that's a thing to be avoided. You told me last time that you didn't part on good terms." And with this Aleck Sedbergh shook his nephew warmly by the hand and hurried away.

As for Harold, he remained for some few minutes musing over what his uncle had said, and then, after the manner of the generality of people who have sought advice, as he walked back to his own rooms, made up his mind to disregard it. On arriving there he found a letter on the

table which proved to be an invitation to spend a week at Derrington Park.

The very thing. Derrington was within ten miles of Enderby, lying about six miles on the other side of Kilmington. It was one of the best houses in the county, and the Newburys, as Harold knew, entertained in princely fashion. A cheery house to pay a visit to, and you were ever such a Sybarite in your tastes. You were sure of meeting pleasant people at Derrington: you could rely on the wines and the cookery; and though field sports were about over for the year, you could be quite certain there must be something going on where Lady Newbury held sway. It is true the more sober people in the neighbourhood of Derrington were wont to shake their heads over the doings at Derrington. There were rumours that the Newburys kept the most uncanonical hours; there were dark whispers of Nap in the evening for by no means nominal points—of Poker in the smoking-room in the small hours. It was said that Lady Newbury was not only desperately given to cards, but was not satisfied unless the stakes were high, and that her sons and daughters had imbibed similar tastes. Derrington, sensible people opined, was a dangerous house for a young man to stay in, and they might have added, for a young woman either. It is difficult to decline to take part in the amusements of the house you are staying in, and more than one of these latter had bitterly rued the consequences of a visit to Derrington.

Harold Sedbergh had of course heard all this gossip, but looked upon it for the most part as sheer exaggeration. He was wont to pooh-pooh the whole thing—say he knew better, he had stayed there, and it was nothing of the kind. He never reflected that he had only stayed there for a ball, and that his visit had extended over only two nights, and that the rubber in the smoking-room had been for moderate points on the first of these evenings was hardly a guarantee that it was never otherwise. He of course knew the Newburys in Town, but he was not likely to be enlightened on their gambling propensities there. He had run across them at Ascot, and though he knew the young ladies by no means confined their speculations to gloves, and had heard that Jim, the one in the Guards, was rather given to

“putting it down,” yet he had no actual knowledge of the fact. At the present moment, all he thought was how jolly it was of Lady Newbury to ask him, that he should pass a pleasant week at Derrington, and could see Bessie again without running any risk of quarrelling with his father. They had always spare riding and driving horses for their friends at the Park. He accordingly accepted Lady Newbury’s invitation, and awaited the day when he became due beneath Sir George’s roof-tree with considerable impatience. He communicated his intended visit to neither the Radleys nor his father, intending to inflict upon them that dubious gratification, a surprise. You may achieve your object, but the chances are much against your advent being regarded as an unmixed blessing.

It is not necessary to go into a very elaborate description of the Newburys. Sir George was a wealthy man ; besides the large landed property he owned near Kilmington, he was also the possessor of prosperous coal mines and slate quarries. The family were all addicted to high play, but, with two exceptions, they were not gamblers ; they played habitually for high stakes, but then it must be remembered they were rich people, and pounds to them were pretty much the same as shillings to others. A dangerous house for any but strong-minded people to stay at. The girls really meant no harm, but utterly forgot that their visitors were seldom as well-off as themselves. Just as they referred any one of their feminine guests who might be struck by some masterpiece of their wardrobes, to go to Madame X——, utterly oblivious to the fact that Madame X—— was one of the most expensive milliners of the West of London, and quite beyond the compass of young ladies with moderate means. I have said that there were two exceptions, and these were Lady Newbury and her eldest son. They say that high play leaves its traces on the countenance, if so, then it was hard to believe that the well-dressed, well-preserved woman not looking within ten years of the half-century she really was, who welcomed Harold Sedbergh in low, musical voice on his arrival at Derrington, was as confirmed a gambler as ever cut a pack. And Jim, her eldest son, had inherited the fatal vice from her.

Harold was so far right in his prognostications. The house was full of pleasant people, and he was made cordially welcome among them, but when at a late hour the men wended their way to the smoking-room, he was fain to admit that the card-playing at Derrington was decidedly not for sugar-plums. Personally he had been fortunate, he had held good cards, and won what he considered a large stake for a drawing-room round game, but he saw that nobody else seemed impressed with it in that light.

But ere they had assembled many minutes in conclave over their tobacco, Jim Newbury, who was never happy unless he was either on the race-course or at the card-table, proposed a quiet hand at Poker. Two of the other men nodded assent, and turning to Harold, Jim said :

“ You’ll join us, Sedbergh? With such a vein of luck as you’re in, it would be a sin not to see it out.”

Now this was just what Harold did not want to do. The round game in the drawing-room had opened his eyes, and he felt instinctively that the play in the smoking-room was likely to be high in real earnest. But then he had been a large winner at Nap, and did not like to refuse. At first his luck stood to him bravely, still although it most certainly could not be said that he did not know the game, he had not much experience of it, and found himself pitted against three practised hands. His injudicious play out-balanced his luck, and the consequence was that at three in the morning he had not only lost his winnings, but a considerable sum to boot. Still, as he ascended the stairs to his bedroom, like most neophytes, he blamed the cards and not his want of skill in the playing of them. A common enough thing in the game of life. We blame the hands dealt us, instead of reflecting on how very badly we played them.

Still, his losings were not sufficient to trouble Harold much, and it was with a light heart that, having borrowed a hack, he rode off next morning nominally to see his father, but in reality to see Bessie Radley. In this latter he was disappointed, for she and her father were out.

But Mrs. Radley was at home, and he learnt from her with much satisfaction that they were coming to the ball at

Derrington, which was to take place on the Thursday night. Lady Newbury threw herself into other things with as much energy as she did into cards. She was always doing her best to keep the neighbourhood alive, and having arrived at the conclusion that it required what she called "a good shaking up," had issued invitations far and wide for a dance at the Park.

Harold was of course aware of this, it was the plea on which he had been asked to stay at Derrington, and it was a consolation to know that Bessie was coming to the ball. That evening, curiously enough, was a repetition of the previous one; he was again a winner in the drawing-room, but when it came to the higher stakes of the Poker table afterwards, the cards once more ran against him.

There was no secrecy about the proceedings in the smoking-room, and if exact sums were not mentioned, it was well known how it had fared with the players on the previous evening. Lady Newbury commiserated with Harold on his bad luck, at dinner.

"It is hard upon you, and hard upon us, Mr. Sedbergh, you win all our money in the drawing-room, and then let them plunder you over the tobacco. Do you think they are too strong for you?"

"Oh, no," rejoined Harold gaily, "it's just my luck turns. There's very little play in Poker, you know."

"Don't fall into that mistake," replied Lady Newbury, shaking her head. "I have played it myself and know." (Was there any game of cards that her ladyship had not played?) "There is hardly a game extant in which skill does not tell in the long run. Take my advice, and eschew cards in the smoking-room, unless you feel confident you play as well as your neighbours."

Harold, however, made light of his losses, saying he had no doubt it would all come back before the week was over and Lady Newbury was not the woman to preach abstinence from what had become to herself a mere habitude.

After the ladies left, one of the men, who happened to be in a cavalry regiment, chanced to mention a match that had taken place in their barrack square only the week before.

"It was the old story, you know, a horse against a man for a hundred yards."

"And what odds did the horse give?"

"He was placed with his head to the winning-post, and at the word 'go,' his rider had to turn him right round before he started, while the man went off at once."

"And the man won?" said Harold.

"No, it was t'other way on. You see the backer of the horse was rather a crafty hand, and he'd got the riding-master to ride his own charger for him. Now old Prance is a tip-top menage rider, and his charger about the most beautifully-broken in England. At the word 'go,' the horse swung round on his hind legs like a teetotum, was in his stride in a second, and fairly chopped Philipson, and yet Tom can run a bit too."

"Ah, now you describe it, I can fancy the man being beat, but in the way the match is usually made, that is, to run fifty yards out, round a post, and then fifty yards home again, the man generally has the best of it."

"Didn't know you were good at running, Sedbergh," said Jim Newbury. "May I ask if you've ever run against a horse?"

"Yes, at Oxford, a hundred yards round a post, as I have just described."

"And you won?" said Jim.

"Yes, cleverly," replied Harold. "I was considered pretty smart up to a quarter-of-a-mile at Oxford."

"I'll tell you what," said young Newbury. "I've got a cleverish pony here—it beats you round a post for fifty or a hundred if you like. Let's have a match. It would be great fun, amuse the ladies, and though as the song goes: 'The nights may take care of themselves as they may,' we are always bothered to know what to do with the afternoons."

"You can put it down for a hundred, Newbury, and I can only hope I haven't gone off in speed since my college days."

The match created great excitement when announced in the drawing-room. The pros and cons were eagerly discussed, and the partisans of Sedbergh were quite as numerous as those of the pony. It was not likely, amidst

that sporting household and their guests, that there would lack of speculation over the event. By the next day, the match was the talk of the whole house, and when they assembled in the Park in the afternoon to see it, from Sir George and Lady Newbury down to the housemaids and stable-boys, the probability is, that there was no one without a wager on the result. Fifty yards of beautiful turf had been carefully measured out, the slender white post at one end, and a white line on the turf marked the scratch line at the other end. Jim's was a very smart pony, but the match was a novelty to him, he had never seen the experiment tried, and he was sorely puzzled in his own mind as to what tactics to pursue. He knew it all rested upon what terms with Harold he got round the turning-point. His pony was quick as a cat on its legs, but if he drove it along at full speed of course it would be much more difficult to pull him up to round the post.

At the word "go" he started at half-speed, while his opponent jumped off with the quickness of a man used to running sprint races. But no sooner did Harold understand his antagonist's tactics, than he palpably slackened his pace till within a few strides of the turning-post, where he made a sudden rush, was round it quick as lightning, and away on the homeward journey at the very top of his speed. Jim's pony was very handy round the post, but still Harold had stolen a long lead from him. And, quick beginner though the little steed was, still for the best part of the way the man was going quicker than the pony, and when the latter began to gain on its leader, there was no time to make up the distance he had lost at the turn, and Harold Sedbergh was an easy winner.

"You've done me," said Jim, good-humouredly, as he jumped off his pony. "Would have, I dare say, anyhow. There's no doubt you understand this sort of thing better than I do. I shall have to study it up before I touch it again. I fancy, though, you would always do the horse over this course."

"Congratulations, Mr. Sedbergh," said Lady Newbury, "although I have lost my money. I was bound to back the family, you know. Let us hope that it's a sign that the luck in the smoking-room is about to turn."

As for Jim Newbury, he pondered considerably over the event of the afternoon, turning over in his mind how he was to be what he called "quits" with Harold. It was not that he bore him the slightest malice for having won his money, that was nothing. Jim never felt the faintest animosity to anyone on that subject, but his *amour propre* was wounded. He had bet upon a "game he did not understand," and had not come out of it so well as the Heathen Chineese. Losing his money he did not mind, but that anyone should obviously get the best of him was always a sore subject with Jim. Although Harold had told him that he had beaten the horse upon a previous occasion, it was his own confidence in the cleverness of his pony that had made him offer the bet—still, he now considered that he had been drawn into a "soft match," and felt that he should not be himself again until he was "up-sides" with Harold Sedbergh.

CHAPTER III.

THE BALL, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE Derrington dances were of high repute within their own radius. Although Lady Newbury had not a little of the great lady about her, and was one with whom her equals never dreamed of taking a liberty, yet she was courtesy itself to the minnows of her circle. Not only were the music and all the accessories of the entertainment carefully attended to, but the family generally looked after their guests. Lady Newbury countenanced no exclusiveness on the part of the house-party, such as is very apt to be the case upon these occasions, and honestly took some pains in the mixing of the social salad she had provided.

Bessie Radley had been looking forward to this ball with impatience ever since they had received their invitations. She had as yet very little experience of such affairs, and this was the first time she had been asked to Derrington, and when she found that Harold Sedbergh was to be there, was quite excited about it. She had speculated a good deal upon what dancing young men she would be likely to meet, but had omitted him from the list. She liked Harold, and was perfectly aware that he admired her. No words of love had ever passed between them, and Bessie would very likely have strenuously denied that she cared for him in that way, but, for all that, their coming to some such understanding was eminently probable. Harold, who was six or seven years her senior, had made up his mind much more definitely on the subject. He thought Bessie the nicest and cleverest girl he knew, to say nothing of the prettiest, for that was matter-of-course, and had quite resolved to win her for his wife. That he was blessed with an extremely crotchety father, he had never given a thought, and that that very irascible gentleman would expect to be consulted about such an arrangement had not as yet crossed his mind.

He was on the *qui vive* for Bessie's arrival, and very pleased was the girl to meet him, as, accompanied by her father and

mother, she entered the ball-room. Her programme was at once pounced upon, and Harold scribbled his name over it in the most unscrupulous way.

"You can't suppose, Mr. Sedbergh," said Bessie, "that I can really give you all those dances. We should be the talk of the room. And think how dreadful that would be."

"I don't see that there would be much harm in it," rejoined Harold. "Why, what could they say?"

"Say I didn't know anybody else, and that I was imposing upon your good nature."

"Not much of that," he replied. "You know I wouldn't change my partner for the whole evening, if I could help it."

"You mustn't talk nonsense, Mr. Sedbergh," said Bessie demurely. "Tell me what you have been doing with yourself all this time. I haven't seen you for ever so long. Tell me what you all do here to amuse yourselves now's there no shooting or anything of that sort. Have you a jolly party?"

"Very," returned Harold. "Oh, we get through the time pleasantly enough. The Newburys are all full of go, you know. What with walking, and gossiping, a little music, and a little cards——"

"Ah," said Bessie, in a low tone, "there's a great deal of card-playing goes on, isn't there? I've heard papa say——"

"We really must not lose this delicious valse," exclaimed Harold abruptly, and without further protest he whirled off his companion, and thereby put a stop to her indiscreet remarks, which he feared might go further than she intended. They both valed well, and to Bessie dancing with a good partner was such sheer enjoyment that she had no desire to abate it. However, when they stopped, she manifested quite as much curiosity as before, as to how they amused themselves, and was much interested when Harold described to her the afternoon's match. She had never heard of such a thing, and was at first disposed to consider it a great feat on Harold's part, until he explained to her that the conditions of the match prevented the horse ever thoroughly using his speed, and that it was, therefore, no such great achievement after all.

Miss Radley really was a pretty girl, and as, with cheeks

slightly flushed with the exercise, and eyes sparkling with pleasure and excitement, she promenaded the room at the termination of the valse, she speedily attracted attention. She knew a sprinkling of the young men present, and others now sought an introduction to her, and when Harold led her back to her mother's side, he said laughingly :

"It's well I was prompt in taking care of myself, for there's hardly a dance left on your programme now."

There were many Kilmington people present, and these naturally noticed Bessie, some with pride, in thinking that a Kilmington girl could fairly dispute the palm of being the belle of the ball, while there were not wanting acidulated matrons, labouring under the delusion that their own geese were swans, who remarked with asperity how much Miss Radley danced with young Sedbergh, and expressed much thankfulness that their own girls never forgot themselves in that way. However, everything must have an end ; at last the doctor turned a deaf ear to Bessie's pleadings for one more dance, and declared he would keep the horses waiting no longer. Harold saw her into a carriage, and as the girl leant back with closed eyes, she wondered whether all balls were as delightful as this had been, and then she thought of all Harold had said to her. If he had not told her he loved her in so many words, she had no doubt about it now, and was troubled with misgivings whether she loved him, and there her meditations were brusquely interrupted by her father's calling upon her to give an account of herself, and asking what Harold had been saying for himself. There was a good deal of Harold's conversation which, however interesting she had found it, Bessie felt did not bear repetition, but she thought the account of the match would amuse her father, who, though he had heard of such matches, had never chanced to see one.

"I am very glad he won," observed the doctor. "Quite likely he wanted it. At all events, losing would have come expensive."

"What do you mean, papa ?" asked Bessie eagerly.

"Why, you don't suppose Captain Newbury makes matches for fun, do you ? You may be quite sure there was a pretty heavy bet on the event. It's in the blood,

they all play in that family, and as for Jim Newbury, clever as he is, there's not a more inveterate gambler out. Harold's no fool, and has got his head screwed on the right way, but it's a dangerous house for any young man to frequent."

Bessie made no reply, but resolved, the next time she saw him, to have a serious talk with her lover on this subject. She had perhaps rather hazy notions of what constituted gambling. She had a perfectly comfortable home, but had never been accustomed to see money treated with reckless indifference, and to play cards or lay wagers, except for nominal sums, she looked upon as radically wrong, if not wicked.

Now there had been present at the Derrington ball a crusty old bachelor, named Shatterley. He owned a small property adjoining Enderby, and prided himself on his plain speaking, which means that he considered he had a license to be rude, and was habitually disagreeable. Why people asked him out was a mystery, and why he accepted their invitations was equally inexplicable. He went everywhere, but never seemed to derive the slightest pleasure from the entertainment. He was given to carping at most things, and unintentionally often made mischief. He was not curious about his neighbours' affairs, nor had he the slightest desire to meddle in them. It was not that he said mischievous things with *malice prepense*, but he had a knack of blurting out things that he had much better have kept to himself. As Doctor Radley said, "He's a man with nothing to do, of very limited ideas, and cursed with a flux of garrulity. He must talk, and as he has nothing to talk about, except the gossip he has picked up in the last two or three days, he pours it out pell-mell, without a thought as to whether it is palatable to his auditors or not."

On the morning after the Derrington ball it occurred to Mr. Shatterley that it would be only neighbourly to go over and see Mr. Sedbergh. They had known each other for years, and though they had often quarrelled, had never come to a thorough break. He had not seen Ralph Sedbergh for some time, it would amuse him to hear of all the proceedings at Derrington Park.

On arriving at Enderby and enquiring for the master of the house, he was at once informed that Mr. Sedbergh was at home, and was ushered into the library. He found his host seated near a blazing fire and facing an open window, through which the boisterous March wind blew keenly.

"How are you, Sedbergh?" said Mr. Shatterley. "Looking well I am glad to see, but, ahem—don't you call that window a little imprudent?"

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it. And I'm surprised that a clear-headed man like you doesn't at once recognise the mistake into which the artificial condition of life in which we live has led us. No wonder the confounded doctors make fortunes out of us. Here, at the healthiest time of the year, when all nature springs into life again, we shut ourselves up and breathe nothing but impurities, instead of the gloriously fresh air that Spring has brought us."

"You may call it fresh air," said Shatterley, testily, "I call it an infernal draught. You'll excuse me if I keep my hat on," and, suiting his action to the word, Mr. Shatterley replaced that article and buttoned his overcoat up tightly.

"You're all wrong," replied the other. "A fear of draughts is nothing but a dread of open windows. A rejecting of the tonic which nature beneficially bestows upon us at this period of the year."

"Tonic! beneficent nature! beneficent bosh! As I have just said, I can't afford to catch a devil of a cold because of your crotchets, so you'll excuse this," and, as he spoke, Mr. Shatterley jammed his hat still tighter on his head.

Ralph Sedbergh nodded good-natured toleration of what he considered his visitor's whim, but it was characteristic of the man that he made no overture towards closing the window in compliance with it.

"Hate draughts," growled the other, "dangerous things. Had to leave the ball-room at Derrington last night because some young fool opened the window."

"A man who opens windows is no fool," rejoined Ralph Sedbergh sharply. "So you were at Derrington last night were you? What sort of a dance was it?"

"Oh, a decent frisk enough. I've seen better and I've seen worse. Champagne over-iced a bit for the time of year. Attendance at supper not quite what it might

have been. Difficulty in getting what you wanted, you know. However I suppose the people enjoyed themselves. Harold looked as if he did, at all events."

"What? Was Harold there?"

"Why of course he was," rejoined Mr. Shatterley, looking at his host in surprise, for it had never occurred to him that Harold had come to the ball from anywhere but Enderby.

"Harold is not staying here just at present, nor is he in the habit of communicating his movements to me," retorted Ralph with an iciness which his visitor attributed to the March wind, but which to those who knew him well betokened that his temper was rising, and might be shortly expected to culminate in a violent outburst.

"No, not very likely. You could hardly expect him to fall in with your peculiar ideas." And Shatterley jerked his head in the direction of the open window. "Well, he seemed to have been enjoying himself last night all the same."

Ralph Sedbergh was nettled that his son should be in the neighbourhood and not have paid him a visit, nor even acquainted him with the fact. Even Shatterley might have seen that he was getting angry, and detected the rising storm in his tones, as he said sharply "So I daresay did a good many others. I don't see why you so particularize Harold."

"Because," rejoined the other, "when a young fellow goes in for a desperate flirtation with the prettiest girl in the room, and dances half the night with her, I consider he's having a better time than most of them. Pooh, Sedbergh, you needn't look so grim about it, we've done it ourselves in our time, and I daresay the young 'uns of to-day feel pretty much as we did about it. At all events Bessie Radley is pretty enough for any young man to lose his head about. And so a good many of them seemed to think, but there's no mistake about it, Harold was first favourite. I tell you what, Sedbergh, you'll have him wanting your blessing and asking your consent and all the rest of it before you know where you are," and Mr. Shatterley chuckled over his own joke.

"Damnation! Do stop your confounded nonsense. How dare you insinuate anything so preposterous as that my son

should dream of marrying Miss Radley. It's not likely that Harold will think of marriage for some time yet, and when he does he'll have to bear in mind that landed property is not what landed property was, and marry accordingly. He need not think to have my consent to bringing a portionless bride to Enderby."

"Well, he isn't asking yet, you know," replied Mr. Shatterley. "There's no occasion for getting warm about it."

"I never was cooler in my life," replied Sedbergh, in tones that palpably contradicted the assertion.

"Well, I'm sure you ought to be. I am," retorted Shatterley, as he rose, with a glance at the open window, to say good-bye. "Good-bye. Don't put yourself out about it. She mayn't accept him, you know, after all."

He left the room quickly, for he was now quite alive to the signs of the gathering tempest. In fact, though he took no notice of it, Shatterley was not deaf to the furious malediction which burst from his host's lips as the door closed upon him.

He had not intended it, it had been done without a particle of malice, but he left Ralph Sedbergh half mad with passion, at the idea of Harold and Miss Radley being the talk of the country-side. As is not unusual with people who live much alone, he had a vivid, though morbid, imagination, and what Shatterley had dropped in mere idle gossip he concluded to be a thing accomplished, and that, utterly ignoring himself, his son had plighted his troth to a girl who would bring with her but a slender marriage portion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEDBERGH TEMPER.

DERRINGTON was always a late house, and it is needless to say that where breakfast ended and luncheon began was a difficult point to determine. On the day after the ball Harold settled, while dressing, that the best thing to brace him up after his dissipation would be a good ride. That it was his bounden duty to go over and see his father, and then, well, he could ask for some tea at the Radleys on his way back. It was quite the proper thing to call upon one's partners after a dance and see that they were none the worse for their exertions. I don't know that it had ever occurred to Harold on any previous occasion, but it certainly struck him that a talk over the ball with Bessie would be great fun.

As soon as he had had something to eat, Harold borrowed a hack, and, announcing to the few stragglers of the party who had as yet put in an appearance that he was going to ride over to Enderby, started on his errand. It was a lovely day, and what with the remembrances of the previous night and the exhilaration produced by his ride, Harold was in the highest spirits when he pulled up at the Hall and sent his horse round to the stables. Though aware of his last craze, he had no fear of quarrelling with his father over it. He could not think it prudent, but to persuade him out of one of his whims was, he knew, hopeless, while as far as he was concerned there was not much in enduring a superfluity of fresh air for an hour. There was never much effusion when he and his father met, but Harold knew him much too well not to detect that his greeting was ominous, and the rather sneering commentary on his tardy visit, that it looked as if he had forgotten his way to Enderby, gave no promise of a pleasant talk between the two.

"I've only been three or four days at Derrington, and one can't quite do what one likes when staying with friends."

"I'm quite aware of that," said Mr. Sedbergh, "and the

chief diversion practised at Derrington is well known. You've played of course?"

"I've done what other people did. You can't stay in a house and not take your part in what's going on."

"Don't talk such nonsense as that," exclaimed Mr. Sedbergh. "Bear in mind that the Newburys are rich. What is mere amusement to them is destruction to you. I make you an allowance suitable to your position, but I don't consider high play at all necessary to it."

"Nor have you any right to look on me as addicted to it," said Harold, indignantly.

"Don't interrupt me, sir," continued his father vehemently. "Don't expect me to come to your aid if you find it a costly visit."

"It would have been time enough to tell me so when I asked your assistance," rejoined Harold. "If I have been slow to come over and see you, it would have been well perhaps if I had been still slower."

"Keep your gibes to yourself, sir. Regard for a father's wishes is out of date now-a-days I know, but," continued Mr. Sedbergh with a bitter laugh, "as long as he holds the key of the cash-box a son is not beyond his control. Not content with gambling, you've been making yourself conspicuous, I'm told, with that ass Radley's daughter, becoming the talk of the county, and otherwise making a fool of yourself."

"I'm not aware," rejoined Harold, sternly "that I have made a fool of myself with any lady. If you have been told that I admire Miss Radley, and danced with her a good deal last night, it is perfectly true."

"And what business, pray," fairly screamed the elder man, now almost beside himself with passion, "have you to be flirting with a penniless girl like her? Don't you know that the rental of Enderby has been reduced a third."

"D——n the Enderby rental," hotly rejoined Harold, "you'll be good enough to refrain from saying anything against Miss Radley in future. I've a great admiration for that young lady."

"By Heavens! the idiot means to marry her," roared Mr. Sedbergh."

"Most certainly," replied Harold, recovering his composure, "if she will do me the honour to accept me."

He already regretted his momentary loss of temper.

Mastering his rage by a violent effort, Mr. Sedbergh retorted with marked coldness and studied sarcasm :

"I have told you of my diminished income, and heard your courteous comment on the subject. As you intend to pay no regard to my wishes, I shall reduce your own allowance in the same proportion, and on the day you marry Miss Radley it will cease altogether. There is no obligation on my part to keep an additional pauper, nor has any man a right to marry until he is in a position to support a wife by his own exertions. Shall I ring for your horse?"

"Thank you, no. I can find my way to the stables. It won't be my fault if I don't marry Bessie Radley, though I *have* yet to learn how to keep her. Good-bye, father," and Harold half stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Sedbergh, with an almost ceremonious nod, and entirely overlooking his son's advance. Another moment, and Harold was gone, and having obtained his horse, was quickly on his way to Kilmington.

Well, he had put his foot in it now, and no mistake. The Doctor was certainly right, the less he saw of his father the better; and yet, was he to blame? He regretted that, even for a moment, he should have lost his temper, but to hear the girl you are in love with unjustly abused would try most men.

It was certainly not he who had provoked his father's passion in the first instance. The frame of mind in which he had found him was due to something else, and not to any indiscretion on his own part. Well, he was not going to give up Bessie, though how on earth he was ever to marry her he most certainly, at that moment, couldn't see. The reducing of his allowance, too, was most inopportune just now, but he did not feel much concern about that, looking upon it as an ebullition of his father's wrath not likely to be really put in practice. One thing seemed clear to him, and that was he must at once tell Dr. Radley what had passed. In spite of the contemptuous expression his father had applied to him, Harold knew that he had a great regard for the doctor. Under the influence of his continual and varied

whims he would call him a charlatan, and so on ; he declined to take his physic, but the doctor always declared that he neither wanted his nor anyone else's, that he was in excellent health, and that he, the doctor, did not profess to prescribe for irritability of temper.

Arrived in Kilmington, Harold made his way at once to the doctor's house, and there Bessie's bright welcome and lively prattle over the events of the preceding evening made him temporarily forget the breach with his father and all the awkward consequences attendant upon it. Bessie never looked prettier, and declared more than once that she never expected to have such a glorious dance again as she had at Derrington, at which Harold laughed, and prophesied that there were many yet before her, adding :

"I'm sure I hope so, for we really were just beginning to get thoroughly into each other's step."

"Oh, Mr. Sedbergh," replied the girl laughing, "considering all the dances I gave you, one of us must be very stupid, and nobody, I trust, can suppose it's me."

"Oh, no," replied Harold. "I can only say in excuse that given opportunity I have great powers of application."

"I hope the opportunity will come before long," she returned, "but you mustn't always expect to monopolise as much of my programme as you did this time."

With this and similar badinage, the time passed gaily enough until, about six, the doctor joined the circle, and soon after he made his appearance Sedbergh rose and declared it was time he was on his way back to Derrington. He wished the ladies good-bye, and as the doctor accompanied him to the door said, "I want to have a few words with you."

"Come in here, then," was the reply, and the master of the house led the way to his own peculiar sanctum.

"You always warned me not to quarrel with my father," said Harold. "I've done it at last in real earnest, although it's not altogether my fault."

"Tell me all about it," was the laconic rejoinder. And without further preface Harold gave an accurate narration of his interview with Mr. Sedbergh.

The doctor listened with the greatest attention, but when the speaker came to his declaration of his love for Bessie

and determination to marry her, the doctor's countenance exhibited marked signs of perturbation, and when Harold wound up by begging his consent to win Bessie if he could, his auditor stopped him abruptly.

"My dear Harold," he said, gently but decidedly, "I've known you from a boy, and I like you better than any young fellow I ever met. I know you're a straightforward, good sort, and I'd sooner give you Bessie than anyone, but, my dear boy, it can't be, it's an impossibility, you must put the thing out of your head altogether. You've not spoken to my girl yet, I hope? I'm very sorry for you, but I must think of Bessie too; even if you've not spoken out, it's not likely that things have come to this pass between you without her making a pretty good guess at the state of your feelings, and when that's the case it's difficult to say how far a girl is entangled herself. I cannot explain to you my reasons just now, you've taken me rather aback, and I must think it all over, and shall possibly decide then that it is best to say nothing further than that it cannot be. I am very sorry, but I had no suspicions of anything of the sort—no, no, don't say anything more," he continued, as Harold was about to utter a vehement protest against such a summary dismissal. "Good-bye, and God bless you," and the doctor shook hands and opened the door and shewed so conclusively that their interview was over that Harold had nothing for it but to take his departure and reflect ruefully over what a good afternoon's work he had done. However, at four-and-twenty our spirits soon recover their elasticity, and though the party generally seemed suffering slightly from reaction attendant on the last night's revel when they sat down to dinner, before that meal was half over the jest was once more upon laughing lips and none of the convives were gayer than Harold Sedbergh. The usual round game took place in the drawing-room, and this time his usual good luck seemed to have deserted him.

"Ah, Mr. Sedbergh," cried Miss Newbury, as, thanks to an almost Nap hand, she swept the board, "you can't expect fortune always to favour you. You had your innings yesterday, when you beat us at racing in the afternoon and monopolised the prettiest girl in the room all the evening."

"I don't complain," he rejoined. "As you say, I'd a good time yesterday, though I'm finding it a bit stormy to-day."

But Harold had yet to discover how strong the tide can run when it once sets dead against you. Though his losses in the drawing-room would have been thought considerable by people not habituated to card-playing on the scale of Derrington, he could not help wondering, as he exchanged a dress coat for a smoking jacket, whether it was the presage of worse to come in the smoking-room. Should he refuse to play? He did not quite like to do that, although he had practically come to the end of his ready money. Notwithstanding the hundred won on the match, he still owed Jim Newbury and one of the other men a good bit over the Poker.

"I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," he muttered, as he descended the stairs and entered the room. The others were already there, and, as he anticipated, Jim's first remark was :

"Come along, Sedbergh, you're leaving us to-morrow, and must have a last flutter, you know, you'll most probably win all your money back to-night ; got through your bad luck in the other room, you know."

However, a black day it had been from the commencement, and a black Friday it was destined to remain for Harold Sedbergh until his head touched his pillow. The cards went against him persistently all through the evening, and when he totted up his losings before rising from the poker-table, he found he was indebted to his companions to the tune of over four hundred pounds. A debt which admitted of no delay in payment, but which must be settled in the course of two or three days. A problem this that has puzzled stupider heads than Harold Sedbergh's.

CHAPTER V.

PAYING FOR PLEASURE.

WHEN Harold awoke at his own rooms in London on the following Monday, the first thing that flashed across him was that the money that he had lost at Derrington had to be obtained somewhere before the post went out. It was a bore ; he half wished he had never gone to Derrington, and yet that ball was a bright sunny spot that made up for all the disasters of the week. He was not in the least a saint, but he was not at all addicted to gambling, nor had he hitherto ever indulged in heavy betting or high play. He had known what it was to be temporarily hard up—who in his golden youth has not ?—but he had never had to undertake a financial operation before. He was no fool, and had not the slightest intention of putting himself into the clutches of the nearest money-lender. He would go down and consult the family solicitors. They would surely make no difficulty in finding the heir of Enderby five hundred pounds. When he arrived at the offices of Messrs. Penge and Carboy, he was, as usual, ushered into a comfortless apartment, requested to take a chair and the newspaper, and informed that Mr. Carboy would be at leisure and see him in a few minutes. After he had studied the paper for a little with that utter want of interest characteristic of a man who has come to see his solicitor on the subject of raising money, the clerk informed him that Mr. Carboy was ready to see him. That gentleman rose from his desk as his visitor entered his room, shook hands with him, and enquired in jocular tones what had brought Mr. Harold down to their dingy old den. Harold at once explained his errand.

“No difficulty about that, sir,” said the lawyer. “We can find you a client who will be very glad to let you have the money at five per cent. on the security of Enderby. Excuse me for one moment, I’ll just step into the next room and see Penge, he has always had the more immediate management of your family affairs.”

Mr. Carboy was absent for a few minutes, and when he came back, he said :

"I am sorry to say this little transaction is not quite so simple as I had hoped. Pray don't think it cannot be managed, but it will involve a little more delay and be a more expensive business than I gave you to suppose. If you'll just step across into Mr. Penge's room, he will explain the state of the case to you."

Mr. Penge, a portly, pleasant-looking gentleman, rose on their appearance, and at once plunged *in medias res*.

"Mr. Sedbergh," he said, "unless you have good reasons for the contrary, I should recommend you at once to acquaint your father that you wish to borrow this money, and bring us a line from him, consenting to your doing so."

"In fact," said Harold, "a guarantee that he will be responsible for the money should anything happen to me."

"Well, yes, that's about what it amounts to," said the lawyer blandly.

"No," said Harold, "I would rather insure my life."

"Ah, I'm afraid," replied Mr. Penge, "that would hardly meet the case."

"Well, to cut a long story short," cried Harold impatiently, "I've quarrelled with my father, and don't wish to say anything to him about this for the present."

"Dear me, dear me," said Mr. Penge, rubbing his hands softly. "It's a great pity, but it's quite a family failing, Mr. Harold, excuse my saying so. The Sedberghs always do quarrel with their fathers."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"Well, the fact is," rejoined the lawyer, "that's just what your father did. He quarrelled with your grandfather."

"I can easily understand his quarrelling with anybody," said Harold, "but I haven't time to listen to family gossip. Can you let me have this five hundred to-day, or must I wait till to-morrow?"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Penge, "the whole thing hangs upon what you call family gossip. Your father, when a young man, like yourself, became in want of money. He lived a very different life in those days from that you always remember. To facilitate borrowing it, like yourself again, he quarrelled with his father."

"Good heavens, Mr. Penge, what has all this to do with me?"

"Everything, if you will only listen," replied the lawyer. "It came to your grandfather's ears, and he offered to find it upon one condition."

Harold nodded.

"And that was that your father should join with him in cutting the entail."

Harold looked at him uneasily, but his eyes were still not quite open to the real state of the case.

"As you know, in the event it made no difference to him. In due course he inherited Enderby—but by will. The entail has never been renewed."

"Do you mean to tell me, then, that I am not heir to Enderby?"

"That will depend to whom your father thinks proper to leave it."

"I understand," said Harold, speaking rapidly. "I must have this five hundred pounds. It's a play debt, and does not admit of delay, but there will be a difficulty about it."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Penge. "You see you've virtually no security to offer. It's true that in course of time you will probably come into Enderby, but it does not necessarily follow. Your father can leave the property where he pleases, and people who lend money are not contented with probabilities. In short, only I see by the marriage settlement that the residue of your mother's fortune comes to you at your father's death, I should see no prospect of borrowing it whatever."

"The residue!" exclaimed Harold. "How comes there to be a residue?"

"When the entail was cut, and your grandfather advanced the sum your father required, it was raised on mortgage over part of Enderby. On your father's marriage your mother's money went to pay off that mortgage, and what little was left after doing so became your father's for life, and then reverted to her children, in this case, yourself. What that residue amounts to I have not had time to ascertain, though it would doubtless be sufficient for your purpose. Still all this will involve delay."

"Which is just what I can't afford," interrupted Harold.

"Do the best you can for me, Mr. Penge, and in the meantime I must temporarily borrow the money somewhere else."

"Pray don't do anything rash," cried the lawyer. "We shall manage this business for you in a week or ten days," but Harold had nodded his adieux, and was already on the stairs before Mr. Penge had finished speaking.

He walked moodily across Leicester Square, pondering, as no doubt many another has done before him, how he was to borrow this money. At last he resolved to go to his club, and take counsel with one or two of his intimates. It was about lunch time, and he would be pretty sure to catch them there. He had one friend in particular, whom he suspected to have had much experience of direful settling days, and the raising of moneys at short notice. As he entered the hall, a letter was put into his hands, one of those letters of which I am afraid young gentlemen in his position have but little experience. It was from Doctor Radley, and couched in the kindest possible terms. He reiterated what he had said at Kilmington, that there were reasons which rendered it impossible for him to consent to Harold's engagement with his daughter, and by the light of his interview with Messrs. Penge and Carboy, Harold began to have some glimmering of the real state of the case, and guessed that the doctor was aware that Enderby was not entailed, and that a marriage with his daughter would very likely determine Ralph Sedbergh to alienate the property from his son. But it was in the concluding lines that Harold recognised the doctor's delicacy and the honesty of his words.

"And now, my dear boy, to wind up," he wrote, "you've quarrelled with your father, and it may be at a very awkward juncture. You are no gambler, but I know what a week at Derrington means. I hope it fared well with you, but if the reverse, there is no one you should come to sooner than your old friend."

This solution of the problem was too tempting to be rejected. He had clearly understood Penge that he would be able to find him this money without fail in the course of a

fortnight. There could be no harm in accepting this help from so old a friend, and though perhaps borrowing a considerable sum from one's proposed father-in-law could be hardly deemed likely to recommend one in his sight, yet Harold resolved to write at once, and gratefully accept the doctor's offer.

But when this immediate difficulty was disposed of, and Harold began to reflect upon what he had heard in Lincoln's Inn Fields, he felt very much like a man who is suddenly reduced to beggary. He had looked upon himself as the undoubted heir to a property worth a good three thousand a year. He was nothing of the sort, he had no more than such claim as every son has upon his father to inherit some of that worldly gear that he must perforce leave behind him ; the inalienable right that he had believed himself to possess did not exist, his chance was at the disposal of a violent-tempered, whimsical man, with whom he had quarrelled ; standing in what he had deemed his rightful position, he looked upon it that, differ as they might, his father could not refuse him a suitable allowance. His father had just informed him that he not only could but should, if he ran contrary to his wishes on the subject of marriage. Then Harold became conscious of having been treated with great injustice. Placed as he was, it was shameful that he had been brought up to no profession. Like many other young men of his class, he had shown no particular desire to earn his own living, but then it must be remembered he was ignorant how very necessary it might be that he should do so. He really had wished to enter the Army, but his father, after his first failure to pass the examination, had thrown cold water on it, swayed a little perhaps by the fiasco in which Captain John's military career had terminated. He was too old now for that, and in what way he was to earn a living Harold at present had not an idea. His blood was up now, and if he was to inherit nothing else he had, at all events, come in for a strong dash of the family temper. He would not give up Bessie, he would not cringe to his father, nor be beholden to him an hour longer than he could help. He must get something to do at once, he didn't know what, work of some sort, and he had misgivings that he did not like work. The remuneration, in the first instance, was not

likely to be great—he had never had occasion to live upon very small means, and he was afraid that he was not clever in making a little money go a long way, but he meant to do it, and after turning all these things over in his own mind, he came to the conclusion that he had better talk things over with his Uncle Aleck. He could put him in the way of earning his own living if anybody in London could.

Poor Harold, he had yet to learn that is the most puzzling question you can put to your friends. Tell them what you want to do, and the chances are they can help you, but the other is a vague interrogation which a man himself is best qualified to answer.

So his luncheon finished, Sedbergh started off, and after the accustomed hunt, succeeded in running his Uncle Aleck to earth. He told his story, to which his uncle listened quite as attentively as Dr. Radley, and when he had finished, said :

“You ask me what you are to do ; neither go to Enderby nor write to your father for the next few weeks, and, above all, keep clear of Kilmington. Radley’s a very good fellow and seems to have behaved very well about the whole thing. Miss Radley, no doubt, is a very charming girl, though I’ve not seen her since she was a child, but look here, Master Harold, Ralph’s a little queer-tempered, I grant you, well a good deal more than a little if you like, but you couldn’t expect him to be delighted at the idea of such a marriage as that. He’s got a pretty tall opinion of the Sedberghs generally. He thinks we are regular swells, and looked forward, hazily no doubt, to your making a very swell marriage. You found him with his bristles all up, and by Jove, you seem to have combed him down the wrong way. Well, you must just lie low, keep quiet, and trust to time.”

“I will never give up Bessie Radley,” replied Harold hotly.

“My dear boy. Who wants you to ? You can’t marry her now, for the best of all reasons—you’ve nothing to live upon. You must temporise, wait upon events, wait for the turn of the tide. There’s the pull of your age. You can afford to do it.”

“Uncle Aleck, did you know the entail had been cut ?”

“Yes, of course ; that came out at your grandfather’s

death. And very much astonished John and I were when we heard his will read."

"It was cruel to have brought me up to do nothing, and in ignorance of it."

"Yes, it was wrong," rejoined his uncle, "but it certainly was not the place of either John or me to interfere between your father and yourself."

"As I tell you, I wish to be dependent on him no longer. What am I to do?"

"Now my dear Harold, don't talk nonsense. The first question that suggests itself is, what can you do? How to earn a living is not to be settled off-hand in the sort of way you call a Hansom. Why even if you had the chinks, and I recommended an eligible pavement, I don't suppose you could draw a mackerel. Now don't look so glum over it, give me a few days to think about it, and I shall perhaps be able to put you in the way of doing something. It would brace you up and do you good, anyhow, and, at all events, remember my advice, keep quiet."

And so saying, Aleck Sedbergh shook his nephew heartily by the hand and bustled off.

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING A REPUTATION.

ONE thing that rather surprised Harold, and which at first he could not understand, was the springing up of quite a little crop of invitations to houses of which before he had had no knowledge, and with the owners of which he had either no or very slight acquaintance. It was quickly patent to him that the whole of this little coterie were given to card-playing, more or less; they did not habitually play for such stakes as were customary at Derrington, but for all that, it was quite possible to lose a tidy bit of money in those pleasant drawing-rooms, where they played whist from afternoon tea till dinner-time, and indulged in a round game sometimes in the evening. One or two tickets for bachelor supper-parties also reached him, and at those there was little disguise about the unholy rites destined to

succeed the repast. It was not to be supposed that it took Harold Sedbergh long to understand the situation. In that short week in the country, he had built for himself the reputation of a gambler. He was recognised as one of the Derrington lot, which was synonymous with being addicted to high play, and made admission easy to any place in which its votaries were gathered together. Now, though the reverse may be difficult to obtain, an evil reputation in London, or, for the matter of that, anywhere else, is easy. Let it be only confidently asserted for two or three weeks that you have been concerned in a brutal murder, and you will find the reputation cling to you for years afterwards. It is of no use that the crime never was proved against you, it was *said* of you, and people seldom forget that, though they rarely qualify it with the addenda "and falsely too." Harold Sedbergh had unfortunately obtained the character of being one of the Derrington lot, and, though he steadfastly declined to touch a card, and dropped the houses where it was expected of him as quickly as he well could, it was little good as far as his reputation went. His friends and acquaintances were firmly impressed with the belief that he passed most of his time at the card-table.

In these days of rail and telegraph, the gossip of the metropolis soon filters down to the country, more especially to the locality in which the individual lives whom it may happen to concern. Kilmington was within an easy distance of town, and the current report of Harold's presumed misdeeds was not long in reaching it. We know what rumour already said about Derrington Park, and his having been a visitor there only made them more prone to believe this of him. Even his staunch friend, Dr. Radley, was staggered, and shook his head, as he thought sorrowfully that the temptation had proved too strong. He had tasted blood, and the fatal fever now filled his veins. That Harold should have quarrelled with his father was bad enough, but should the news of his present life reach the latter's ears, the doctor felt that the breach between them would indeed be past repairing. He did not as yet understand how wide that breach was, for though Harold had given a fairly accurate version of the scene that had taken place between him and his progenitor, he had naturally said

nothing of the menace of the latter, should he dare to marry Bessie, to Bessie's father. Without Ralph Sedbergh's cordial assent, Dr. Radley regarded Harold's marriage with his daughter as an impossibility. It would simply mean ruin and unutterable misery to both of them. He knew what a vindictive man his old friend was in his wrath, and to trust to a man like Ralph Sedbergh's relenting was a thing for which the doctor had no stomach. But if it had been an impossibility before, it had become still more so now. Putting everything else on one side, he would never consent to his daughter marrying a gambler, and then he thought to himself there was one chance for Harold. The end of that madness could not be far off, owing to his limited resources. The doctor thought it best to say nothing to Bessie about her *penchant* for young Sedbergh. If the flirtation between them had been pretty marked, Harold, he knew, had not actually spoken of his love. He was not likely to be seen in those parts for some time, and it was best to leave such feelings to die away of their own accord, but that they had not as yet done so he was unpleasantly reminded that evening, after dinner, when he happened to mention the Kilmington gossip to his wife.

"It's a terrible pity," he said, "to see a nice young fellow like that go pell-mell to the dogs. 'The best thing that can happen to him now, is to be utterly ruined as quick as may be. His gambling associates will drop him then, and he will perhaps turn over a new leaf."

"I don't believe a word of it, papa," chimed in a clear, young voice from the other side of the table, in tones that trembled slightly with indignation. "People have no right to say such things. I don't believe Mr. Sedbergh does anything of the kind. He made and won an extraordinary match at Derrington, but I don't believe he played cards there."

The doctor looked at her for a moment, and then gave vent to a low whistle.

"Then all I can say is," he replied at length, "that Derrington is the most maligned house, and Bessie Radley the most credulous young woman, in the county."

"I have my own opinion," replied that young lady defiantly. "The Kilmington people are nasty, malicious

wretches, and always have been. Next time I see Mr Sedbergh, I'll ask him the truth."

The doctor and his wife exchanged glances. Mrs. Radley had not been altogether blind to what had been going on, but her husband had given her to understand that Harold's last had been a farewell visit, and that it was as well that he should come there no more. She had acquiesced in her lord's decision, although he declined to tell her more than that he had good and sufficient reasons. She was disappointed herself as, apart from liking Harold himself, she held that the young heir of Enderby would be a very fitting mate for Bessie. She did not possess the doctor's knowledge of Harold's title in that respect.

But though his sweetheart might believe him, young Sedbergh could scarcely credit himself how the news of his Derrington escapade had spread, and how its results had been exaggerated. He had hardly realised the evil reputation he had achieved, until he one day ran across his uncle John, hobbling up Pall Mall. The Captain was in his sweetest temper, just recovering from a bout of his old enemy, and contemplating his fellows with benignant eyes.

"Ha, Harold!" he said, "I haven't seen you for ages. Been laid up you see," he continued, pointing to his gouty shoe. "Never see anybody then but Phillips, my fellow, you know. Great mistake to see anybody who can swear back at you when you've got the family complaint. Phillips only charges it in his book. I tell you what my boy, I don't like the account I hear of you."

"I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you've heard."

"Pooh, stuff and nonsense! You know what I mean well enough, but I tell you, Harold, it won't do; your governor's not the man to stand that sort of thing; besides you'll only go to the devil if he would."

"I suppose the long and short of all this is you've heard I've stayed at Derrington?"

"Of course I have. We all know what that means. House where they keep a roulette board in the drawing room, and play chicken-hazard all night over their cigars. Old Billy Pouncett told me all about it."

"And a good many lies to boot," said the young man

indignantly. "They play cards rather high at Derrington, I'll admit."

"Should think they did," said Captain John. "And you've developed a taste that way. Wouldn't have been asked to Derrington if you hadn't. Now just take my advice, cut it."

"I tell you I played cards at Derrington and lost my money, and there's an end of it."

"Oh, yes, I know, put it that way if you like. The Newburys always do. Won a running match for a monkey didn't you? Ah, Billy Pouncett told me all about it. Quite right, though, quite right, to keep such little games to yourself. Still they *do* get talked about you know, and I say emphatically, Harold, my boy, as an uncle very fond of you, cut it. I don't want to preach, but take my advice, cut it, before it cuts you. Good-bye. Haven't time to talk any more, been starved for the last fortnight, and have got a doosid healthy appetite to attend to. Once more good-bye." And Captain John hobbled off in pursuit of luncheon, and a special brand of Burgundy that he much affected.

"Cut it," muttered Harold viciously, "I think I'll begin by cutting him, and as for old Billy Pouncett, I don't know him, but d—n him, at hazard. It really is provoking. Of all the unlucky visits a poor beggar ever paid, none could have been worse than mine to Derrington. Handsomely cleaned out, first-class quarrel with the governor, and threatened with the loss of the only girl I care about. Everybody apparently thoroughly convinced that I have had a passion for cards from my very cradle. I suppose they'll say next whenever I am seen on a railway, that I am working the three card trick." And Harold indulged in that cynical laughter man is wont to, when the world is going against him.

Bessie was very unhappy. If no actual declaration of love had been made by Harold, a very good understanding existed between them on that point, and the girl had very little doubt of having that whispered in her ear before long. She must get at the truth of all this. She felt convinced that more had happened than she was aware of. As for Kilmington people, they always did talk. She did not

believe that Harold had gambled at Derrington, but even if he had, how could he help it?

Was it not notorious that they always did play there? And how could a man stay in a house and not take part in all that was going on? The Kilmington people were very glad to go to balls or dances at Derrington whenever they were asked; they didn't taboo the Newburys, they didn't raise their voices and protest against their iniquities. Why then all this outcry against Harold? She was sure there was something else. She had caught her father and mother upon two or three occasions lately looking at her, and then exchanging significant glances, when the conversation had happened to turn upon the doings of the Sedberghs, father or son. She was far too high-spirited a girl to make a moan over her troubles, but the first thing towards facing them was to come to a proper understanding of what they were, and she had divined intuitively that for some reason or other she would not see Harold again for some time. She must know that reason, and she set to work to insidiously cross-examine her father and mother. The former, as she might have guessed, proved as difficult to crack as a Brazil nut. The doctor had at all events thoroughly learnt one valuable qualification of his profession, the keeping of a close mouth, and from him she extracted nothing. But with her mother it was different. She speedily learnt from her that a quarrel had taken place between Harold and his father, and would have been doubtless further enlightened about the particulars thereof, had Mrs. Radley known them, but these, as well as Harold's proposal for her hand, the doctor had kept to himself.

Bessie was fain to admit that her investigations so far had resulted in nothing. Closely as she pressed her mother as to what had led to that quarrel, for the above reasons Mrs. Radley could tell her nothing. "What good would it do you to know? What could you do if you did?" cried that lady in extreme weariness at the close cross-examination to which she was subjected.

"Help Harold," was the girl's prompt reply, though had she been in full possession of all the circumstances, it would have puzzled Bessie to say in what way she could do so. As it was she felt bound to confess that there was

nothing for it but to wait, hope for better times, and stand up for her lover in the face of all Kilmington if necessary. Ah, if only he was her avowed lover, how sweet it would be to make his quarrels her own, and do that. How much she had to do with Harold's quarrel with his father she was not destined to know for some time yet.

Harold Sedbergh did indeed want help just now, though not such help as Bessie could possibly afford him. He was very despondent about the aspect of his affairs, and rather irritable in his temper in consequence. He had heard nothing from his Uncle Aleck, and was now aware that his finding something to do was by no means easy of achievement, nor likely to be facilitated by having earned, however unjustly, the reputation of a gambler. That terrible question of his uncle's was for ever ringing in his ears, "What can you do?" and he was sadly obliged to confess to himself—nothing. He had had a good education, of which he had taken fair advantage, but he had been brought up to do nothing. He was in no pecuniary distress, and although Messrs. Penge and Carboy had not as yet found him that money with which to repay the doctor, they had assured him, in spite of the unexpected delay, that he would certainly receive it before long, but regretted to inform him that the remnant of his mother's fortune was less than they had supposed. Still, Harold knew his father's temper too well to suppose that he would not do what he threatened; that his allowance would be forthwith reduced he never questioned, and that his marriage with Bessie would be the signal for his disinheritance he never doubted. It was well, he thought, that Mr. Sedbergh never came to London, for if this unlucky reputation, which had been so unfairly thrust upon him, should come to his ears, there was no saying what harm it might do him; as it was, in the seclusion of Enderby, a seclusion much increased by his eccentric habits, Mr. Sedbergh was not likely to hear of it.

"If I'd only a Puritan relation or two to improve the occasion and talk about the danger of touching pitch, etc., it would be complete; as it is, I seem to have gone Nap with a vengeance; as far as my experience goes, having once soiled your fingers, you may as well thrust your whole hand into the cauldron."

CHAPTER VII.

BESSIE'S DISCOVERY.

AMONG the guests at Derrington, during the ball week, had been a Mr. Philip Lumsden. He was rather an intimate friend of Jim Newbury's, they having one common bond between them, to wit, a passionate love of high play. Phil Lumsden, as he was usually called, was a City man, which, being interpreted, meant that he was a daring speculator on the Stock Exchange. When a man is that, he thinks little of high play at the card table, and Lumsden formed one of that select Poker party in the Derrington smoking-room. He had been excessively civil to Harold since, and had asked him to dinner or supper on several occasions. He had no sinister designs whatever in this ; he simply thought that Sedbergh was a man of congenial tastes, and mistook what had been an unfortunate episode in Harold's life for an ordinary habit. To him, as to Jim Newbury, the excitement of high play had become a necessity. They were both strictly honourable men, but held that if their practised skill proved too much for those who joined them in their favourite amusement it was no business of theirs. It was for every man to take care of himself at the card table, and if he doubted his ability to do so he ought not to be such a fool as to sit down at it.

Lumsden had put the same interpretation as all the world had upon Harold's being at Derrington, and though a little surprised at his refusal to take part in the card-playing at his—Lumsden's—rooms, had put it down as either one of those fits of superstition which make a gambler sometimes give up play for a time, because he considers his evil star in the ascendant, or from the equally common case, that he was temporarily at a loss for ready money. He was still far from grasping the fact that Harold was quite a neophyte, and already bitterly repented his initiation into the mysteries of high play.

Harold was much astonished one morning to receive a

visit from Mr. Lumsden, who sent up his card with an intimation scribbled on the back that he should be very much obliged if he could see him on a little matter of business for ten minutes. Wondering what business on earth Lumsden could have with him, he ordered that gentleman to be shown up.

"Rather an uncanonical hour to intrude upon you," said his visitor, as they shook hands, "but I've put off my journey eastwards for an hour on purpose to have a few minutes' talk with you. The fact is, I've a favour to beg of you."

"What is it?"

"It's all come out of that match of yours, at Derrington. We got talking over it, at a party in my rooms last night, and I was rather chaffing Jim Newbury about what a show you made of him, and he said that he was young at the thing, and didn't know how to make the most of his pony, that it was odds in favour of the man—the distance was so short, that you were a flyer at a hundred yards, but that if it had been a bit further you would have been beaten. I said, not a bit of it, you were running as strong as ever at the finish. Then came more chaff, and at last Newbury said he'd make the match at a hundred and fifty yards and give you another turn in. However, the end of it all is, that I've backed you for a monkey, to beat Jim on any horse or pony he likes, round an equilateral triangle measuring fifty yards each side. The first question is, will you run for me?"

"When's it to come off?"

"This day month. I need scarcely say that you may have as much of the bet as you choose."

"You're making a great mistake, Lumsden. You saw me play at Derrington, it was my first experience. I played because everybody else did, but I have no intention of repeating the experiment. I'm not rich enough even if I desired to do so."

"But you will run for me, won't you?" enquired Phil, rather anxiously.

"Are there any other conditions connected with the match?"

"One hundred forfeit on either side, should it not come

off, but in consideration of his having unlimited choice of horses——”

“You have unlimited choice of men,” interrupted Harold; “I would rather not run.”

“I hope you won't stick to that,” rejoined Lumsden, “for I have named you, and wish no better man to run for me, but Master Jim is a monstrous cute hand, and I have stipulated vaguely that I have a choice, of course. It must be the stipulated triangle, and fair galloping ground, but it gives you the pull of starting a little against collar and finishing with a descent, or *vice versa*, whichever you think suits you best.”

“And you'll have to pay forfeit if I don't run for you?”

“Well, yes,” said Lumsden, shrugging his shoulders. “Of course, I ought to have made the match subject to your consent. I never dreamt of your having any objection, nor, indeed, do I think had Jim. However, if you don't like to run, there's no more to be said.”

Harold was silent for two or three minutes. If he was to run this match, he would have to get into condition for it. He had no doubt Newbury had got an animal in his eye, a great deal cleverer than the pony he had ridden last time, and further that he would have the advice of an expert as to how to ride it. He wanted something to take him out of himself.

“Yes,” he said at last. “I'll run for you upon one condition, that it is thoroughly understood by everyone concerned that I have not a shilling on the event. I have never run such a race as this exactly, but you're so far right, Lumsden, you need have no fear of my staying a hundred and fifty yards.”

Phil Lumsden was profuse in his thanks, and speedily took his departure. He had no wish that Harold should be responsible for any part of his bet, unless he desired it. Most of his own associates would have insisted in sharing the wager, and he could do no more than ask Sedbergh to do so in the first instance. When Harold thought the thing over, he had grave doubts as to whether he had not done a foolish thing. If this thing got talked about, nobody would believe, in spite of the stipulation he had made, that he was not concerned in the bet. One thing, the choice of

course rested with him, and he must at once write to Lumsden, and make it a *sine qua non* that wherever the match might take place, it should not be run at Derrington Park. If it took place there, the news of it would fly all over the county like wildfire. No, there were lots of places about London where it could come off, and Kilmington and its neighbourhood be none the wiser. Comforting himself with this reflection, Harold determined to at once get himself into condition, and resolved to engage the services of a professional gentleman for the last fortnight. His pride rose at the idea of being worsted by Jim Newbury. He might not be able to hold his own with that gentleman at the card table, but this was a very different matter. He had heard nothing from his father directly, but when his quarter's allowance became due, found that he had been as good as his word, and that it was reduced by one-third.

Although Ralph Sedbergh still persisted in declaring his belief in the benefits of fresh air, open windows became more endurable to his friends and visitors as the Spring wore on. Although "Half our May's so awfully like mayn't," still towards the end of that reputed merry month the sting is usually out of the wind, and the air is balmy with the presage of coming summer.

Ralph Sedbergh never mentioned his son's name, and when, in his anxiety to ascertain how matters stood between them, the doctor hazarded an enquiry as to whether he had heard from Harold, Sedbergh replied with a negative; adding drily, that he had neither wished nor expected to. But there was one thing that the doctor had picked up amid the gossip of Kilmington—that a week or two after Harold's last visit, Ralph Sedbergh's solicitor in that town had been sent for to Enderby, and had had occasion to drive out there once or twice since. The doctor shook his head as he told his wife this, and remarked that he was afraid it augured no good for Harold. That Bessie quickly heard this little bit of news from her mother was matter of course, and the two women marvelled a good deal in what way it would affect that young gentleman's prospects. Not being possessed of the doctor's knowledge with regard to the Endersby estates, they could only make vague guesses

on the subject, the most plausible of which was that the alienation of more or less personal property would be the result of Harold's quarrel with his father. Still Papa had said that the mere fact of Mr. Greenwood having been up at the Hall in itself boded harm to Harold, and that was quite enough to call forth all Miss Bessie's vigilance. She felt quite sure that Harold's interests were menaced, and though perhaps her own might never be bound up with them, yet she was resolved to watch over them as closely as she could, if only for his sake. She was quite sure of one thing, and that was that he ought to know all that was going on down there. All these little things seemed trifles with nothing in them to her mother and herself, but to Harold they would probably have a very different signification. She would write and let him know all the gossip she could pick up concerning him. There could be no harm in that, it would be for him to determine whether there was anything in it or not. From this out, Miss Radley was all eyes and ears about anything connected with the Sedberghs. It was lovely weather for riding, and she was passionately fond of that exercise, and with a hazy idea that she was in some measure watching over her lover's concerns, Bessie constantly cantered over to Enlerby, and stared moodily at the Hall, as if by so doing she could penetrate the secret intentions of its eccentric owner.

Another very favourite ride of Bessie's was to Derrington. It was through very pretty lanes, and then there was a splendid canter on the turf when you got into the park, about the privilege of riding or driving through which the Newburys were very good-natured to the Kilmington people. She liked to look upon the large, though irregular, pile that stood in the centre, and call to mind the recollection of that one glorious night she had passed there.

Although her father often accompanied her, his professional duties sometimes took him, what Bessie termed in sadly dull and uninteresting directions, and on these occasions they parted company, and the girl rode by herself. Her attention was aroused one morning, as she cantered through the park, by a singular enclosure. It was an equilateral triangle in shape, with a line of rails about

three foot six high running round each side of it, while at each angle was a slender white post, some ten or twelve feet high. She pulled up and stared at it, puzzling what it could be meant for. There was nobody about to appeal to on that point, and finally, Bessie came to the conclusion that it was designed for a small plantation, for ornamental purposes she supposed, and yet she thought what a remarkably ugly shape to have selected for it under those circumstances. However, she might be wrong, it might have relation to shooting, or even to foxes, but that it was meant for a plantation of some form she entertained no doubt. By the time she reached home, she had pretty well forgotten all about it, and little dreamt that her morning's discovery was destined to turn out of considerable importance to her lover later on.

"Well, whatever fresh air may do for the health, it certainly don't improve the temper, that is, if one may judge by Ralph Sedbergh," exclaimed the doctor, as he came in to luncheon. "I'll go to Enderby no more; I've known the man and laughed at his crotchets because we were all boys together. John's a bit peppery, and I've been friends with him all my life, but Ralph's become unbearable. There's one thing, poor fellow, 'pon my word, I don't think he's quite responsible. There's no saying a word to him, but I firmly believe he's suffering from cerebral irritation, the result of suppressed gout. I shouldn't quite like to prescribe for it; I do believe if he held high revel on port or Burgundy for two or three days, got a little drunk, in fact, he'd bring it out and be a deal better for it."

"My dear," said Mrs. Radley laughing, "I shall begin to agree with Mr. Sedbergh, and doubt your professional knowledge. Why, he'd be worse than ever. I'm sure people are never fit to speak to when they've got that complaint, and it's been my misfortune to know a few."

She said nothing, but once more Bessie trembled for her lover's future. From a father in Ralph Sedbergh's state of mind what might not be expected? She did not know what harm he could work Harold, but in his wrath Mr. Sedbergh was not likely to spare anyone who had incurred his displeasure. She had vowed to help Harold, she had made up her mind to write to him and let him know any-

thing that she thought might be tending to his prejudice, but what could she say? That his father was in a bad temper, and that a solicitor had once or twice been over to see him. It all amounted to nothing. She would only be called a meddlesome little goose for her pains. Ah, if she could only stand between him and such ills as might threaten him he should see how staunch she could be to him. Still, she never relaxed her vigilance, and her ears were greedily opened to all Kilmington gossip that trended on the Sedberghs or the doings at Derrington Park. It was not long before she heard that triangular enclosure which had attracted her attention discussed. The speakers mostly took pretty well her own views concerning it, and only speculated as to what could have induced whoever planned the new plantation, to give it such a very ugly shape, but she was rather struck by a remark that fell from a quiet old gentleman who was present on the occasion, who closed the little debate with:

“Before we condemn its shape it would be perhaps as well to wait and see if it is meant for a plantation,” and though he was promptly met by:

“What else could he suppose it was for?” he evidently remained of opinion that the protection of young trees might after all not be what it was designed for.

Bessie rode out again next morning to once more see what she could make of it. It was noon when she entered the Park, and though she rode round the enclosure she could make nothing more of it. There were no signs of preparations for planting, there was not a soul about, nor did it look as if the slightest additional work had been done to it since she had first discovered it. It was a fresh June morning, and the day had been heralded by a gentle shower or two, and as the girl sat puzzling over her problem her eye suddenly caught hoof-marks on the soft turf. What could be the meaning of this? She paused for a moment and thought, then quietly edging her horse away from the rails, walked him leisurely round the triangle. Yes, it was very curious, the hoof-marks ran all round, and were clearly fresh. There could be no doubt a horse, or perhaps by the multiplicity of the marks, horses, had been galloped round the enclosure that morning. What a singular freak for any-

one to have taken into their head. What could be the meaning of it? And who was the rider? There was nobody at the house—the Newburys were all in Town, she knew; and, still pondering over what could be the fun of riding round a triangle, Bessie cantered home to luncheon.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN TRAINING.

ONCE get through the interminable maze of bricks and mortar that surrounds London to the west, and you come to a surprisingly pretty country. Out Edgware and Hendon way are a number of quaint little villages that remain pretty much as they were fifty years ago—there are queer little inns of the old roadside type—sleepy little public-houses we should call them nowadays, when anything that entitles itself to be called an inn indulges in an extensive display of gilding and plate-glass. There are two such as I mean to be seen at Neasdon, and on Kingsbury Green stands one unpretentious little house of this description that, except in the matter of gorgeous advertisements of aerated waters, has not changed since the decade preceding the Crimean War.

Kingsbury, and its satellite, the Hyde, are almost as they were in those days; here and there perhaps a house has disappeared, but as a rule I fancy that those who departed this life at the beginning of the century, could they revisit their old haunts at its close, would find no difficulty in recognising the once familiar scenes.

True to his resolve, as the time for his match draws near, Harold Sedbergh puts himself in the hands of the Bounding Bantam, a professional pedestrian of high repute, and affirmed by his friends to be the fastest quarter-of-a-mile runner in England. The Bantam, after slightly testing his pupil's powers, says, that if he can only get him "fit," that it ought to take a smart pony to beat him; but the Bounding one speaks very disparagingly of Harold's condition, with which really there is no great fault to be found, but the more difficulties of that nature he can suggest the more it

will conduce to the Bantam's honour and glory should his man win; moreover, as that gentleman confides to his cronies, "It don't do to let these swells think a few days is enough for a preparation, we've got our living to get, and there's a tidy profit to be got out of training at so much per week, and I likes to give 'em plenty of time," and the Bantam closes his oration with a significant wink.

He, however, soon found out from Mr. Lumsden and one or two of his friends who came down to see Harold in his training quarters, that there was a good deal of money upon this match, and Phil Lumsden gave the Bantam clearly to understand that Harold's backers were prepared, in that worthy's vernacular, "to behave like gentlemen in the event of their man winning."

After a few days at the White Hart at Neasdon, the Bantam pronounced they were attracting too much attention. That a gentleman of the Bantam's celebrity should be in charge of a novice naturally excited curiosity, and though he preserved an impenetrable silence for what he was training his pupil, yet people would stare and dog their footsteps in the hopes of witnessing they didn't exactly know what, but such task as the Bantam might call upon his charge to essay. He decided upon more secluded quarters, and insisted upon Harold removing to a quiet little place he knew of, some few miles off, namely, "The Plough," on Kingsbury Green.

"It mayn't be stylish to look at," said the Bantam, on their arrival, "like the Green opposite it ain't got no pretence about it, but it's clean, quiet, and comfortable, and that, fresh air and exercise, is about as much as you want when you're in training."

Two days after their arrival in their new quarters Harold Sedbergh was rather surprised at a note he received from Bessie. There was not very much news in it, a little of the local gossip of Kilmington, a very guarded allusion to the Squire, in which she managed to let him see that presumably in consequence of his ill-health he had so nearly quarrelled with her father that she could give him but little tidings of him. She knew that he would read between the lines here, but how to tell him that Mr. Sedbergh's solicitor had been out twice or thrice to see him at the Hall, had

proved beyond her, she felt that he ought to know it, but, situated as she was to him, it was impossible to announce it straight out, but there was one curious bit of news towards the finish of the letter that made Harold smile.

“The Newbury people are all away,” she said; “they’ve railed off the most singular plantation in the centre of the Park, at least that’s what we suppose it’s to be; all Kilming-ton is much exercised concerning it, whether it’s for pheasants or foxes, or both; there’s one thing, it can’t be for ornament, nobody ever heard of a triangular plantation for that purpose. With kind regards from my father and mother, that is, there would be if they knew I was writing,

“Ever yours sincerely,

“BESSIE RADLEY.”

This remarkable enclosure might be a puzzle to the good folks at Kilming-ton, but its meaning was very clear to Harold Sedbergh, and he felt now that he had a mission for Bessie. “By Jove!” he muttered with a smile, “I must write and ask her to turn tout.”

If Bessie had been curious before about the new plantation her curiosity was still further stimulated by Harold’s letter; he evidently took great interest in her discovery; he did not tell her the use for which he had little doubt it was destined, but exhorted her to watch it closely and to let him know anything further she might find out about it. He also suggested that if she rode over to Derrington before breakfast, he fancied she might be enlightened regarding that enclosure.

“Don’t think I’m joking,” he added, “but be good-natured, and do what I ask you.” “It is very odd,” thought Miss Radley, “but a canter before breakfast these summer mornings would be delightful, and it makes an object even if nothing comes of it.” Lumsden arriving the next day to see how his champion was progressing, was much interested on hearing the news from Derrington Park.

“Yes,” he said, “Jim Newbury is no fool; it wasn’t likely he would make a match of this kind without having a pretty smart animal of some kind; no doubt it’s in strict training and that blessed triangle has been put up for it’s

especial benefit. I dare say your informant could give a little more accurate information if he was asked—tell us how the pony gets round his corners, for instance, and perhaps even tell us what time he does the whole course in. A sharp chap might manage that.”

Harold did not think it necessary to tell Phil Lumsden that his correspondent was a lady.

“I can trust to my informant’s brains and eyesight,” he replied, “all he picks up I shall know in the course of a day or two. Don’t be nervous about your monkey, Phil, the Bantam will tell you that you will have a very good show for it.”

“I know that,” replied the other, “it’s awfully good of you to take all this trouble for me, but the fact is I’ve got a lot of money on it. You see it’s just this, it’s come to a regular game of ‘brag’ between me and Jim Newbury, and our respective friends. Jim’s pals look upon it that he’s so sharp he must have the best of me; my intimates don’t think I’m quite a fool in my own line; there’s a bit of vanity mixed up in it all, and apart from the money I’d give a good deal to beat Newbury over this match. It’s the Guards against the Stock Exchange. What does the Bantam say?”

“Well, he never saw a match of the kind before, but thinks I ought to win; however, I suppose Jim has picked up something amazingly clever.”

“Yes, he’s very dark about it, but brags he’s got something as quick as a squirrel, and that can pirouette like a queen of the ballet. I must be off now, but I’ll come out again the day after to-morrow, if it’s only to hear the news from Derrington.”

According to her instructions Bessie rode over to investigate that mysterious enclosure in the early morning. She had a delightful ride, but on reaching the park speedily became aware that she had arrived too late to witness what Harold had doubtless intended her to see, but she began to have some idea of what that triangle was meant for. Close to it was a somewhat portly man, mounted on a clever-looking cob, and by his side, talking to him, was a mannikin, astride of a very well-bred pony, which blew slightly, as if recently galloped. They were in such earnest conference

that for a minute or two they didn't perceive her, and the stout man, whom she recognised as the stud-groom, referred once or twice to a largish watch that he took from his pocket ; perceiving Miss Radley he said something shortly to his companion, and led the way back to the house, raising his hat courteously as he passed her, though if she could have heard his muttered "What the deuce brought her prying out here at this time of the morning I wonder?" she would have understood that she was not a welcome visitor. The horses' footmarks that she had noticed running round the enclosure on a former visit flashed across her mind, and it instantly dawned upon her that some such match as Harold Sedbergh had run the week of the ball was in course of rehearsal ; what it was, or whether he had anything to do with it, she, of course, couldn't tell, but that he knew of it and was interested in it was evident. She rode slowly on through the park for a little, and then turning back passed close to the enclosure, and saw as she anticipated that quite fresh hoof-marks once more ran round it ; this was what Harold wanted to know about no doubt ; she would write at once and tell him of her further discoveries, and also ask him to particularise what it was that he wanted her to ascertain exactly.

But Bessie had not to wait for an answer for the very next post brought her further instructions. Taking it for granted that she had already discovered what the enclosure was made for, he begged her to watch whether the pony was quick round the turns, and though he hardly hoped she would be able to find out for him, yet if she could ascertain what time that pony took to get round the triangle he should like very much to know it. "Even if you can manage it," the letter continued, "it is impossible to do this accurately without a 'stop watch,' can you get such a thing?"

"Well," said the girl with a light laugh. "I can hardly say that Harold is taking me into his confidence, though he has done me the honour to appoint me his tout at Derrington. I don't know for certain, but I've a strong idea that he's got all wrong with his father chiefly on my account. Well I'd do his bidding blindly over much bigger things than this, and he knows it, I'm afraid, only

too well," and then practical Bessie began to think what she had to do. It was not very likely she thought that Langridge the stud-groom would wittingly allow her to see the pony do his appointed task; she was not learned in turf lore, but she had a hazy idea that trainers did not encourage spectators when they tried horses. No, to do what Harold wanted she must be a concealed looker-on at the pony's performances, and how that was to be managed for the moment rather puzzled Miss Radley. About a stop watch there was no difficulty, her father had one which he occasionally used professionally, and there could be no difficulty about borrowing that for the occasion, the question she had to decide was where she could hide herself in the park, so that she could see all Langridge's proceedings without being seen by him, and Bessie pondered as to whether it would not be necessary to have recourse to a confederate. She was not clear either that she quite understood the management of a stop watch, and she remembered having heard her father say that if unaccustomed to one it was very easy to make a mistake, and that when it came to a matter of seconds a slight error made a great difference, however, it was evident from Harold's letter that there was no time to be lost, and it was necessary to decide at once upon her plan of operation.

At last Bessie resolved to take her father into her confidence; there would be no reason she thought to say anything about her having either written to or heard from Harold, she had found this out accidentally in a morning ride, and Langridge taking away the pony the minute he saw her had piqued her. She was determined now she *would* see and know all about it. The doctor burst out laughing when he heard his daughter's story, but it did not occur to him to connect Harold with it, he was up in London, and not likely, in the doctor's opinion, to trouble Enderby and that neighbourhood for some time; he had little doubt that Jim Newbury, profiting by past experience, was preparing a rod in pickle for somebody, and that they would hear plenty about a match in Derrington Park before the autumn was over.

"The idea of your turning horse-watcher—it's too ridiculous. Are you aware of all the pains and penalties

incidental to the calling? How the tout has at times been ducked in a horse-pond, worried by dogs, and locked up in the weighing-room of the stand? Just fancy yourself in any one of those positions, my dear."

"Don't tease, papa," replied the girl, "but just tell me how I'm to be even with that disagreeable old Langridge, as if my looking on could possibly have done any harm. I didn't see Harold Sedbergh's match in the spring, remember, and I do so want to see how they manage these things. I suppose the man always has a lot the best of it?"

"It must depend a great deal upon how handy the horse is, I should think, but if you are to start touting, you'll have to do it on your feet, you'll be too conspicuous on horseback."

"I can't walk from Derrington and back before breakfast, there isn't time, papa."

"Well, you see, as the leading medical man of Kilmington, I can't exactly turn horse-watcher, but I'll so far abet you in your felonious designs as to drive you out, drop you at the park gates, while you go for a walk, and pick you up again on my road home."

"Oh, that will do capitally," cried Bessie, clapping her hands. "Put me in the park on foot, and it will be very hard if I don't find a bush or a clump of trees or something from behind which to circumvent old Langridge. You shall lend me your stop watch, and then when we hear of this match coming off in the autumn, we shall know which side to back."

"You unprincipled little wretch," replied her father. "Upon my word, touting is a most demoralizing occupation, and you're actually making me an accomplice to your iniquity."

"Never mind, we'll drive over at daybreak to-morrow morning, and in the meantime you shall teach me how to manage the watch."

The next morning saw Miss Radley pass through the gates of Derrington Park at a very early hour. That there was no sign of Mr. Langridge and his charge she quickly satisfied herself, and soon selected a small clump of trees at some little distance from the enclosure, in which she ensconced herself, and quietly awaited events. She was

not much too soon, and had only been about twenty minutes in her concealment, before she descried the trainer accompanied by a boy with the pony, on their way from the Hall. The latter was first sent two good canters, then a half mile sharply, and was then walked quietly down to one of the angles of the enclosure. "Ah!" exclaimed Bessie to herself, "now come his lessons." Thrice, with an interval of about a quarter of an hour between each performance, did the pony scuttle round the triangle with wonderful rapidity. So absorbed was the girl in his performance the first time that she quite forgot all about timing him, the second she had grave doubts as to whether she had managed her watch quite so cleverly as she ought to have done, but the third time she felt quite sure of her accuracy. "Eighteen seconds," she muttered, "I wonder whether that's quick. I am sure it looked it. It was more like a rabbit than a pony scudding round that triangle," and then, having waited till Mr. Langridge and his charge were well on their way back to the house, Miss Radley made her way out of the park to rejoin her father.

CHAPTER IX.

AT "THE PLOUGH."

THE quiet little place to which the Bantam had brought his charge, although possessing that recommendation, could not be called luxurious. In the sitting-room, which, though now used exclusively by Harold, was usually the public parlour, the furniture was scanty and primitive, consisting principally of half a score of Windsor chairs, of which two or three, in virtue of their arms, were considered easy ones. The floor was sanded, and the sole attempt at ornament was that impossible looking-glass over the mantel-piece, one glance into which put you out of conceit with "the human face divine" generally, and your own in particular. No caricaturist that ever wielded pencil, could possibly distort the face to the extent that wonderful glass did; the landlord was rather proud of it, he looked upon its peculiarities as enhancing its value, boasted privately that it had been there ever since he could recollect, been there, he believed, ever since

the "Plough" had been an inn, and that nobody who looked into it had ever forgotten it.

"Why bless you," he said, "chaps who ain't been in the house for twenty years or more always recognize that glass, there ain't such another in England."

But Harold cares little about his surroundings, in all the health and elasticity of spirits, that the regular hours and plain living his trainer compels him to keep, produce, Harold is quite content with the Windsor chairs, and the soft summer air that, laden with the scent of the jasmine, honeysuckle, clematis, etc., comes through the casement. He sits at the open window this morning, gazing at the little patch of green opposite, and pondering over Bessie's report.

"It's true then, and Newbury has picked up an out-of-the-way clever pony." Eighteen seconds. Can he beat that? He doesn't know—he has never even tried this running round a triangle, and the turns he supposes must make a difference in the time. The Bantam, oddly enough, although he has timed him over a straight hundred and fifty yards, and professed himself satisfied with the result, has never, as yet, called upon him to run that distance according to the conditions of the match. "Stupid of him," thought Harold. "He surely ought to have trained me over a course similar to that I am engaged to run over." Absorbed in the desire to beat his opponent he takes no heed that he will benefit not one shilling by the victory, he only knows he shall be cruelly disappointed by defeat, he is bitten by Phil Lumsden's feeling on the subject, he remembered what Phil said the other day, "I've a lot of money on it, but it isn't altogether that, I can't bear the idea of being beaten by Jim Newbury. Well, Phil's to be down to-day, and he must talk it over with him." Eighteen seconds! He wondered what Phil would say to that; it took him about that to do the hundred and fifty yards without the turns, indeed it was a fine point whether he *could* do it in that time. "Hang it, it would be an awful bore to find I'm not quite good enough."

Lumsden duly turned up in the afternoon, according to his promise, and on being told of Bessie's report remarked, "Yes, Master Jim's very clever, and never more dangerous

than when disposed to brag. When he boasts of holding four aces, he's generally got 'em or something pretty near it. I can't understand the Bantam not training you over the course you're to run. I'll have a talk with him before I go. Now you mustn't think, old man, because I can't run that I know nothing about it. Since I made this match, I've chummed in with some running men, and got, I fancy, a bit of their learning; don't you think that Newbury's going to have it all his own way. You'll win yet, only do exactly what the Bantam tells you that's all."

Harold promised to leave himself entirely in the hands of his trainer, and Lumsden shortly took his departure, after having held an earnest conference with that worthy.

The evening post brought Harold a rather unpleasant letter from his uncle Aleck. "Come and see me at once," it ran, "I've got an opening for you which at all events you would do well to think of, and remember except for tried men nothing of this sort is kept waiting long, but what I want to see you still more about is a bit of gossip concerning yourself, which is gradually becoming common property, and which will most assuredly find its way into the papers before forty-eight hours are over. When we talk about a thing in Fleet Street, the odds are the public read about it the next morning, and it is rumoured that you have backed yourself to run against a horse for a large sum of money. My dear Harold, do consider the consequences of this. You're at loggerheads with your father at this moment, this is sure to widen the breach, for he will put the worst possible interpretation upon it, call it reckless gambling, and goodness knows what; I don't want to preach, but is it prudent of you to still further irritate him now? You know how hot-tempered he is, and remember your future lies entirely at his disposal; hard lines that it should be so I admit, but we must deal with things as they are. Enderby should go to you, and neither John nor myself wish it otherwise, but if you *can* back out of the business take my advice and do, the less your father hears of you now the better, and more especially in that sort of way.

"Your affectionate uncle,
"ALECK SEDBERGH,"

This really was very disgusting. Harold had expressly stipulated that the match should not be run in Derrington Park, because he desired that it should be unknown to Kilmington and its neighbourhood, but the affair had grown into a much bigger thing than had been originally contemplated; many men had been interested in it, and much money had been wagered on the result, and when that is the case there is sure to be plenty of talk about it in club smoking rooms, and the sporting world generally; he saw clearly that his uncle was right, but he saw also that it was impossible for him to back out, and even if he did, that the announcement of his undertaking would be in the papers all the same, and as likely as not with an exaggerated version of what the original match had been made for. Even those directly interested in the event, could hardly be expected to know that he had not a shilling on the result; in fact, except Lumsden, the probability was that everybody believed him to have backed himself heavily. That confounded visit to Derrington, how he wished he had never gone there; no he didn't, hang it, the ball was worth all the consequences. He had acquired a reputation for gambling, and supposed he should never lose it, and yet in truth, as the French cynic said, "he had renounced the vice, because the vice had renounced him," if for no other reason, you cannot play when you've no money left to gamble with. Rightly or wrongly, Harold ascribed the notoriety which the match had now obtained to the vaunting of Jim Newbury, and after a little he lost all thought of the probable disasters consequent to himself in his ardent desire to disappoint that gentleman. The absorbing question in his mind was could he beat eighteen seconds? and upon this point his trainer also seemed to display much curiosity.

He could no longer complain that the Bantam did not try him round a triangle; that eminent pedestrian had marked out a course of that description in a handy grass field, and schooled him round it pretty constantly, making him traverse it sometimes one way and sometimes another, and consulting his watch closely after each performance.

The Bantam seemed by no means satisfied with these experiments.

"It's a queer thing," he remarked one morning, "but we all seem to have been made a bit lop-sided; you never meet a man, sir, as good with one hand as the other, do you, sir? Take the pugilists, they can always hit harder with one fist than the other. Now, Mr. Sedbergh, I'm not going to have you worry yourself about time—as I've told you already, that's my business—but I don't mind telling you, sir, it makes a trifling difference which way you run it. You're a little slower running it left-handed than you are right. May I ask if you happen to have a copy of the exact conditions of this match?"

"No," rejoined Harold. "Mr. Lumsden made it, and the conditions were drawn out by him; they're just what you've been told, I only stipulated for one thing—that it should come off in the neighbourhood of London."

"Humph!" grunted the Bantam, "that's just the loose way you gentlemen do things, and then you expect the trainer to do you justice. If I only knew exactly what the course was, I should train you for that only; however, it's no use talking about that, but another time you take my advice, Mr. Sedbergh, and mind you have proper articles drawn up."

This again made Harold reflective. That problem of the eighteen seconds was bad enough and the Bantam was particularly exasperating over it, declining to tell his charge anything about his spins, on the ground that it only disheartens a man to find that he has not made quite such good time as he reckoned on, although all the same, it may be quite good enough to win with. Men and horses too varied a bit, and were better some days than they were others.

Ah, where? Like his trainer, Harold became extremely anxious to know *where* the match was to take place. The day was drawing very near now, and he had quite forgotten to ask Lumsden what ground he had selected. Close to Town and much talked of, the probability was there would be a considerable number of people down from London to see it, and that alone would make it certain to be in the papers. To change the *venue* now was impossible, and after all what did it matter? the match had obtained notoriety, and, let the tryst be as mysterious as if it were a prize-fight, there would still be plenty of people to see it.

No, Uncle Aleck's advice had come too late, he must go through with it now, but he did wonder what spot Phil Lumsden had selected.

Miss Radley continued to be very assiduous in her visits to Derrington Park; she knew now pretty well to a nicety at what time Langridge and his charge would make their appearance, and had contrived to witness most of that pony's gallops. She had timed him more than once in his performance round the enclosure, and found that he varied little from the eighteen seconds she had noted on that first morning. All these things were duly chronicled, and reports were despatched to Harold Sedbergh. One thing though Bessie did not mention, and that was that her father was an accessory to her touting; it had certainly occurred to the doctor when she persevered in it that this could not be all idle curiosity. The girl must have some strong reason for continuing her self-imposed task, and that reason could only be that she knew Harold to be mixed up in the business. Now if he *had* been so foolish, the doctor was quite willing that he should be put in possession of any information that might be of use to him. He was certainly desirous that there should be no further intercourse between the two, but in these days of the penny post, to prohibit it altogether was absurd, and more likely to keep the girl's lover in her mind than not.

Harold, although grateful for her information, and begging her to let him know everything concerning that clever pony, never mentioned what his particular interest was in its performances. Another thing too, which the girl could not make out, was what on earth he was doing at Kingsbury. She had looked up Kingsbury in railway-guides, handbooks to Middlesex, etcetera, and had discovered that it was a small village on the outskirts of London. What could have taken him there? Surely fishing so close to London could not be worth having, and she could think of nothing else calculated to amuse a young gentleman with Mr. Sedbergh's tastes at a suburban village in the middle of summer. It really was very odd, and she must insist on knowing all about it in his next letter; it was not fair that all the news should come from her side, and he tell her nothing about himself.

But Bessie, as well as the public generally, was destined to be speedily enlightened. A very few days now would decide whether Harold or that clever pony was the quicker round the triangle, and a full account of the match would in all probability be found in the daily papers.

CHAPTER X.

“THE MATCH.”

THE day appointed for the match drew very near, and, as both Harold and his uncle had foreseen, paragraphs concerning it had cropped up in all the papers. It didn't much matter how they originated, but they were freely copied from one journal to another. It was said to be for a very large sum of money, and would, no doubt, be rather a singular contest; about the exact terms of the match there prevailed too no little discrepancy, and the papers corrected each other's statements with considerable acerbity. The news speedily reached Derrington; in the first instance, Jim Newbury was only alluded to as an officer in the Guards, and his antagonist as a well-known amateur pedestrian, but in an age when the public crave greedily for all details of such transactions it was not likely that names should not ooze out, and in twenty-four hours it dawned upon the sporting spirits of Kilmington what that enclosure in Derrington Park which had so mystified them was meant for. Miss Radley and her father were probably the only two people hitherto who had solved the mystery.

The doctor shook his head when he saw it, and said it was a bad business. There was very little chance that the squire would not see it also, and the doctor felt sure that, bad as things stood now between father and son, this would make them much worse. He had not seen very much of Ralph Sedbergh of late—designedly. He knew the painful state of irritability his old friend was in, and he wished to avoid an actual quarrel with him, and that was a thing difficult for any one to avoid who came in contact with him. One morning an urgent summons arrived from

Enderby, and the groom who brought it—and had evidently not spared his horse by the way—said his master was very bad indeed and in awful pain. The doctor lost no time in complying with the summons, but, sorry though he was to hear of the state of his old friend, he could not help saying to his wife before he started:

“Ah! my dear, he’s called me a quack many times, but you see, in spite of all his theories, the first time he’s really ill he sends for me.”

But there was a still greater triumph awaiting the doctor at Enderby Hall. On his arrival there, he found the squire not only seriously ill, and in great agony, but a brief examination of the patient sufficed to show that a severe attack of the gout was the malady from which he was suffering. The doctor had always held that complaint, in its suppressed form, was the cause of all Ralph Sedbergh’s eccentricity, and had said over and over again, that if he could only have one good fit of it, he would become a rational being, and exhibit but slight infirmity of temper. There could be no doubt the time had come to test his theory. But that this latter improvement had not as yet commenced was very evident, from the full flavoured language the victim was using to those about him, but in the first acute agony that was only to be expected. The doctor indeed told his wife afterwards with much gusto, that his patient was quite “his own self,” and, upon being told what his ailment was, stoutly asseverated he was never troubled with the complaint. However, Dr. Radley, having prescribed the usual remedies and promised him a speedy alleviation of the very acute pain, did not think it necessary to argue that question out with him, but drove home, wondering whether he would prove right in the opinion he often expressed, concerning the result a sharp attack of his hereditary foe would have in changing Ralph Sedbergh’s character.

Mrs. Radley and Bessie were very full of questions on the doctor’s return, and then he reflected that Harold’s name had never been mentioned between himself and his patient. Whether he had seen the paragraph or not, the doctor couldn’t tell. He thought not—as had it been otherwise, he couldn’t conceive the squire not only alluding

to it, but pretty strongly too. On the whole, he thought it a favourable sign for Harold that nothing had been said concerning him, and only wished those anomalous visits of Greenwood, the Kilmington solicitor, to Enderby, had worked no further harm than the paragraph.

His father's attack was duly reported to Harold in Bessie's letters, but that gentleman was not much disturbed by the news; he was sorry for his father, but gout was the lot of all the family; and he had seen his Uncle John wrestle through too many fits of their hereditary enemy to feel nervous about it. He was more anxious, sad to say, to know whether he could beat that eighteen seconds than anything else just at present. But the Bantam was inflexible, and though his watch was constantly in his hand, obstinately refused to give even a hint of what it told him. The one thing that consoled him was that Phil Lumsden was sanguine, and he thought probably that the Bantam was more communicative to him.

Sandown had been finally pitched upon for the battlefield, and permission having been granted by the committee, the pretty Esher race-course saw a rather select gathering assembled one summer morning to see this novel affair brought to a conclusion. As Lumsden had said, there was a good deal of money upon it, but although that might be the case, it seemed as if there was by no means enough, and the partisans of horse or man seemed equally confident. A shade of odds either way was eagerly snapped at. Great curiosity was evinced to see the competitors, and in this respect, the pony was undoubtedly the favourite. A well-bred, very knowing-looking brown animal, who, his owner avowed, was quick as a cat, and cunning as a monkey, laughingly adding that he could be backed to go up a ladder and down the other side, and though of course, that was only Jim Newbury's bounce, there could be no doubt that he had implicit faith in the powers of his galloway to do what he was asked. Then people flocked to look at the course. An equilateral triangle neatly railed off, with long white posts at all three angles—a fac-simile in short of the enclosure in Derrington Park—and some of the ladies. and there was a very fair sprinkling of the gentler sex present, expressed an opinion that it was likely to be

dangerous for the man, he was so liable to be knocked down at the turns.

But what are they delaying for? Why don't they start and get it over? There is only this match, let us get it over and get back to Town for lunch. Sandown, with neither racing nor a band, is not good enough to waste a lovely summer day on, in the very height of the season. Such were the questions impatiently buzzed about as the pony walked round and round in his sheets, and Harold Sedbergh, with a loose great-coat thrown over his running costume, chatted carelessly with his friends.

At length it was noised about that there was something wrong, that there was some dispute about the course. "Absurd—ridiculous—where would they expect to find a more beautiful piece of turf than this? If it was not quite as level as a bowling green, they could hardly expect to get a better hundred-and-fifty yards anywhere."

"I can't tell you," replied an enlightened man who had just come out of the stand, "I only know that it's Newbury making the objection, and that it has been referred to the stewards—no, I don't mean the stewards, but three other Johnnies, you know. They'd a lot of trouble to catch three fellows who hadn't a bet on the result."

Gradually it oozed out that the dispute was not about the course, but whether the race should be run to the right or left hand, and that upon that point Mr. Lumsden claimed the privilege of choice. The agreement had been strictly and accurately drawn up, and as Phil pointed out, the choice of course was distinctly left to his option, always providing that it should be a perfectly fair one to both parties, and that race-courses ran indifferently one way or the other. To that the three gentlemen to whom by mutual consent it had been referred assented at once, but the match was so novel a one that they requested some little time to consider before giving their decision.

Clever Jim Newbury had entirely overlooked this point when the terms for the match were drawn up, and it was not till Lumsden claimed the right of choosing which way round the triangle they should run, that he saw what a mistake he had made in allowing the insertion of the clause,

"Choice of course providing it be fair to both parties." Nobody was more keenly interested in the point at issue than the respective trainers, and oddly enough if it had been left to them the question might have been amicably settled. Langridge knew that he had trained his pony to gallop to the right hand, and the Bantam knew that his man's time was a trifle better that way round the triangle than when he reversed it. After a slight discussion the referees gave their verdict, which was that Mr. Lumsden was clearly within his rights, and was entitled to say which way the race should be run, and to the disappointment of both trainers he immediately pronounced to the left hand. No further time was wasted—Jim Newbury was much too old a sportsman, his objection once decided against him, not to at once accept the verdict. The pony was quickly stripped and Harold, who was as much bewildered as his trainer, threw off his great-coat and walked round to the starting-post.

"I can see you're both puzzled at my taking the left hand, but you may depend on it I am right. If it bothers you a little, Sedbergh, it'll bother Newbury's pony a good deal more."

The story of the race is soon told. Harold was on the outer side, and the pony next the rails not only sustained his reputation as a quick beginner, but at the end of the first fifty yards had decidedly the best of it. But then came Sedbergh's opportunity, the pony ran out a good deal more than was usual in his lessons at home, and, crossing behind him, Harold was round the post and away over the second fifty yards at his best pace, arriving at the second turn with a pronounced lead. From that moment the race was virtually over. The pony once more ran out and the jockey seemed as much bothered as his mount, and though they were catching their antagonist at the finish, it was too late, and Harold ran in the winner by eight or ten yards.

"You've won again," said Jim Newbury, with an easy smile, "my pony's really clever, but the left-handed course put him out a bit. It would have been a nearer thing the other way round, though I'm not sure you wouldn't have beaten me all the same."

"Perhaps so," said Lumsden, "but my man's a bit better that way too."

Then came the congratulations of the winners, and much elation on the part of Lumsden and Harold at having got the better of the astute Jim Newbury. Even the losers could not help laughing over the results of a contest between two such very wide-awake gentlemen as the makers of this match.

There was much rejoicing when the news reached Kilmington, for Kilmington had long ago claimed Harold Sedbergh as one of its own athletes, and, like all country towns, took much interest in the success of one of its own celebrities, and in his college days, Harold had figured conspicuously in University sports. Even at Doctor Radley's there was much pride in the victory, mingled though it was with fear of what disastrous consequences might ensue to the victor. Still, winner or loser he would have gained the same notoriety and figured quite as conspicuously in the papers. At Enderby, the Squire was about as amiable as a man with a sharp attack of the gout may be expected to be. He had most assuredly not yet arrived at that composed and happy frame of mind which the doctor had predicted, and in the meantime he made no allusion to his son; the papers were placed on his table as usual, but whether he read them they could not tell. If he did, he could not help seeing the account of Harold's exploit, but he made no allusion to it, although, as Harold had foreseen, the victor was credited with having won a large sum on the result.

Still, as the acute pain gradually yielded to the doctor's remedies, Ralph Sedbergh perceptibly calmed down. Those about him found him less irritable and more tolerant about any delay or mistake in complying with his wishes than they had ever known him. The doctor also noticed it after the manner with which we all see our predictions realized. But he also observed that the attack was of a more serious nature than he had at first anticipated, that he had no sooner subdued it in one place than it shewed a strong tendency to break out in another, in fact the patient was going through a series of fits of the gout, with intervals it is true in which he was calm and free from pain, but all of

which gradually reduced his strength, and Dr. Radley, who in the first instance had honestly thought that his old friend would eventually be a good deal better for the outbreak, began now to look rather seriously upon the case. "His strength's desperately reduced," he muttered "and if the disease shews a tendency to assert itself in a vital part, in Ralph Sedbergh's present state that would very likely be a case of 'touch and go.'" Tractable though the invalid was, the doctor still did not dare to mention Harold's name to him, and though Mrs. Radley and Bessie were exceedingly curious on the subject, the doctor could tell them nothing as to what Ralph Sedbergh's feelings were towards his son.

As for Bessie, she had received but one letter from Harold since the match, and this she had not thought proper to show to either her father or mother, although the writer had been pretty explicit as to his feelings regarding herself. He thanked her for all the trouble she had taken, assured her that his victory was due mainly to herself, and that, let rumour say what it would to the contrary, he had not a sixpence on the match. "I ran it," he continued, "partly to oblige a friend, and a good deal out of pique. I was very anxious to beat Jim Newbury, but I don't want anyone, more especially your father, or yourself, to think that I am a gambler. Some of these days, Bessie, I hope to ask you for yourself, but for the present I have to discover how I'm to earn my own living. Will you wait for me, Bessie? Though it must be some time yet, dearest, before I have a home to offer you."

Looked at from a common-sense point of view, there was really nothing in this rhapsody of a hot-headed young man to make the girl the least happy, and yet Bessie Radley went singing about the house as if she had no idea that the young prince was disinherited. True, she did not positively *know* this, but from what he had said himself, and from what her father had told her, she might fairly conclude that he would be in no position to marry her during Ralph Sedbergh's lifetime.

With the decision of the match, Bessie's object in the morning rides, or rather drives as they had been latterly, had disappeared, and though there was no occasion now for such early rising, yet she dearly loved accompanying her

father on his rounds these fresh summer mornings, and was constantly his companion to Enderby Hall, walking her horse up and down outside while he paid his daily visit to his old friend.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OF RALPH SEDBERGH.

ONE morning, as the doctor was paying his customary visit, Ralph Sedbergh suddenly remarked abruptly, "You've, of course, seen this ridiculous match of Harold's in the paper, and further that he's won a lot of money over it. It's a pity, he'll never keep it; there's not much chance for a man when he once turns gambler. As soon as I found he was in with the Derrington people, it was easy to foretell what would come to pass."

"I think and trust you're wrong," rejoined the doctor, gently; "that Harold has played there's no doubt, and lost more money likely than he's won, but I should be very sorry to look upon him as a confirmed gambler."

"It's like opium eating," said Ralph meditatively, "you soon become its slave. Look at Lady Newbury, I don't suppose that woman could sleep without her game at cards, and her son in the Guards is just as bad."

"Yes, but it don't follow because a young man has been foolish once he's to continue his folly all the days of his life. Believe me, you'll find Harold no gambler. You're going on very nicely, keep yourself as quiet as possible, and now I must be off."

"You're always in such a hurry to be off," rejoined the invalid pettishly; "you might spare an old friend a quarter of an hour. You can't think what dull work it is lying here, chained either to the bed or the sofa."

"You mustn't say that," replied the doctor gently. "I sit by too many weary bedsides in the course of my rounds not to know. But my daughter rode over with me, and I've already kept her waiting a good-half hour."

"What! Bessie? I don't think I've seen her since she's done with school. I'm told she's grown up a very pretty girl—she promised to, as a child."

"She's a good-looking wench enough," rejoined the doctor, shortly. "And now once more, good-bye."

"Stop ! I should like to see her. Ask her next time she comes to do a good-natured thing and pay a very bored invalid a visit. She won't be in such a confounded hurry as you always are, and have time to tell one some of the gossip of the neighbourhood."

"I will tell her," said the doctor drily, rather taken aback, and much perplexed about the advisability of Bessie paying such a visit.

He turned the matter over in his own mind as they rode homewards. He did not wish that Ralph Sedbergh should be able to say that he, for one moment, countenanced a match between Bessie and his son. At last he told his daughter of the invalid's request.

"I'm pleased he's asked for me," replied the girl, "he has never seen me to know me, I believe, since I left school. His last recollection of me must be that of a long-legged girl with a passion for all boy's pursuits and her dress always in tatters."

"And you think we've improved upon all that," replied the doctor, laughing.

"I should like Mr. Sedbergh to see that I've turned respectable now I'm grown up," rejoined Bessie demurely ! "besides, joking apart, papa, it's just possible I may be of some use if I get on with the Squire."

"Remember," said the doctor peremptorily, "you're not to mention Harold's name under any circumstances. You promise me that ?"

Bessie willingly gave the required pledge, but it was not very likely she would touch on so delicate a subject of her own accord. But she did wish to produce a favourable impression on Mr. Sedbergh, and looking upon that as impossible unless he saw something of her, was jubilant at the idea of these visits. She had perhaps never heard of that wealthy individual who left all his fortune to the only one of several nephews whom he had not seen, disliking all those he had. Bessie accompanied her father the next day, and so well did she get on with the invalid that she became a constant visitor. She had naturally more time to spare than her father could afford, and she did not grudge doing

her best to lighten the weary hours of sickness for Harold's father. The passionate man of the past was hardly to be recognised in the subdued man of the present, and the doctor began to get uneasy at finding his prediction so amply verified. He would have preferred to see an occasional outburst of the old choleric temper, rather than this languid indifference which he felt sure was the result of weakness and prostration. Ralph Sedbergh in these days would lie very still while Bessie talked or read to him. His head was clear enough, as the shrewd remarks he sometimes made amply testified, but he did not talk much; but chary though he was of conference it was manifest he took great pleasure in the presence of his young visitor. The expected allusion to Harold was so long coming that Bessie began at length to think that his son's name would never again pass Ralph Sedbergh's lips. But one day she was startled by his saying abruptly: "You hear from Harold sometimes, no doubt?"

She felt her face flush painfully; often as she had expected some such allusion, she had never thought of its taking that shape. She was confused and angry with herself that she could not prevent the tell-tale blood dyeing her cheeks, and was moreover conscious that her interrogator was taking keen note of her confusion. "Sometimes," she faltered at length.

"Have you heard from him lately?"

"Yes, not very long ago."

"Ah, singing pæans of joy over his foolish victory, exulting at having discovered this new way to pay old debts."

"Indeed, Mr. Sedbergh, he said nothing of the kind. He was pleased at having won this match for his friends, but, as far as he was concerned, I've his own word for it he was not a penny the richer."

"He said that?"

"Yes, and I believe him," rejoined Bessie hotly, "whatever the papers may say to the contrary."

"No doubt," replied the invalid drily; "but you're so far right; we're vile tempered and have plenty of other faults besides, but we Sedberghs don't lie. I suppose you *do* believe what Harold tells you?"

Once more Bessie coloured at the marked intention

which Mr. Sedbergh gave to the latter part of the sentence.

"I am sure Harold wouldn't tell me an untruth," she replied.

"I should hope not. I hope, at all events, that he has never told you he will be a rich man. There, that will do," he said quickly, "we have had more than enough talk about him and his follies," said the invalid wearily; "let's change the subject."

Bessie did not think it expedient to tell her father of this conversation. In the first place, she had promised that no allusion to Harold should pass her lips, and though it had been no fault of her own, still he might feel annoyed that there had been talk concerning him between his father and herself, and secondly, she had never confided to the doctor that she had heard from Harold since the match. Bessie was quite aware that she grew in favour day by day, and now no morning went by without her passing an hour or two in the invalid's room. One thing perplexed her, he never again referred to Harold, and it seemed as if with that curt "Let's change the subject," he had dismissed it entirely from his mind. Her father, though he said nothing, was growing very uneasy about his patient. The various attacks had taken a great deal out of him, and though he bore his illness with the patience those having previous knowledge of him could have hardly credited, yet the doctor could not shut his eyes to the fact that this was in some measure due to his extreme prostration. He was getting, moreover, rather despondent about the prospect of his ultimate recovery.

"Doctor," he said abruptly, one day, "I'm not more afraid of death than my neighbours, but it is as well to have a little time to square one's accounts in this world. Remember, I've left it to you to warn me when my days are numbered."

"Pooh, pooh!" replied the doctor cheerily, "you mustn't get such ideas into your head. I'll have you on your legs again in a few weeks, and better than you've been for years, owing to this short attack. But above all, my dear old friend, don't give way to despondency; why I've heard medical men who have been in India say, that when

a native has made up his mind that he's going to die, the whole College of Surgeons couldn't save him, although perhaps there was nothing the matter with him."

But although the doctor might speak thus cheerily and hopefully to Ralph Sedbergh, he actually thought that if he had matters to put straight in this world it would be as well that he should attend to them. The gout, at times, despatches its victims with remarkable celerity, still he did not like to increase the depression under which his patient was apparently labouring. And then he thought, if it wasn't that he feared throwing Ralph Sedbergh into a fit of dangerous excitement, how he should like to suggest that he hoped he would part, at all events, in charity with his son. Then, too, there was this unfortunate entanglement between Harold and his daughter. The doctor was a high-spirited man, and he shrank from the idea that he might be accused of endeavouring to serve his own interests in any attempt to bring about a reconciliation between father and son.

"It's a very awkward case," he muttered; "he wants building up, the strength's so knocked out of him, and yet the usual props to the system are very likely to bring on another attack. It's awkward—very awkward."

One morning, on paying her usual visit to the invalid, Bessie was a good deal puzzled when, the usual greetings over, Mr. Sedbergh took a packet from the table at his side and said:

"I've a favour to ask you, Bessie; I want you to take care of this for me, and, unless I ask you for it back, to comply with the instructions written outside. They are very simple, you see. This is the fifteenth of July. The packet is addressed to you, and you're requested to open it this day twelvemonth and comply with the directions therein contained."

"I will do as you wish, Mr. Sedbergh," replied Bessie, as she took the packet, "but surely my father or (she had nearly blurted out Harold)—or somebody else would be a fitter person than me."

"I happen to think I am the best judge of that," he rejoined, curtly. "You promise faithfully to do what I ask of you?"

"Yes," returned the girl nervously, "if you think it best."

She felt that that packet concerned Harold, and ought properly to be in his keeping.

"And further, you promise," he exclaimed abruptly, almost sternly, "that you will not let a soul know that paper is in your keeping until the date when you are authorised to open it. Promise me that too."

She hesitated for a moment, she felt a little confused. She was sure Harold's interests were bound up in that packet. What if she should be working him harm in keeping this secret to herself? Oh! how she wished it had been left to her father, or an older head than her own to decide what it was best to do in this case.

Ralph Sedbergh looked keenly at her, and read the conflict going on in her mind aright.

"Promise," he said, almost fiercely, "or I swear I'll destroy it at once, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you've done more harm than you'll ever put straight."

"I promise," she rejoined, "that no one shall know that I have this packet in my possession, till the time appointed."

"Good!" rejoined Sedbergh. "I think I can trust you; now let me hear no more about it," and he abruptly changed the subject.

Dr. Radley was getting more and more exercised in his mind about his patient. He was still loth to admit that he was so seriously ill as in his heart he believed, but he did know that his brothers ought to be informed of his state, and above all his son; and yet, as we know, he had reasons which made him very disinclined to write to Harold if he could avoid it. It was made more difficult for him too, from Ralph Sedbergh manifesting a considerable touch of his old choleric temperament again. Even with Bessie, in whose hands he was by far the most tractable, he would manifest a considerable amount of feverishness and irritability, and with the other satellites of his sick room he was by no means so tolerant as he had been in those early days succeeding his attack. The doctor was quite aware that whatever Greenwood, the solicitor, had been wanted to do

at the Hall, he had most certainly not been sent for to undo it. He had never been summoned to Enderby since its master's illness. The doctor's perplexities were speedily terminated. One morning, at daybreak, a messenger arrived from the Hall requesting his immediate presence, as Mr. Sedbergh was much worse and, they thought, dying. Hastening to his friend's bedside, the doctor sadly recognised that the attendants were only too correct in their surmise; the gout had flown to Ralph Enderby's head, and there was little probability of any but one termination to the attack. There were a few incoherent mutterings from time to time, but for the most part the sufferer was unconscious. The strong, wilful, eccentric brain had collapsed. When the eyes opened, there was only a dull, wandering recognition of those they looked upon—all chance of recovery the doctor knew was hopeless. That he might lie there breathing, but insensible, for a few days before all was over, was very possible.

Bessie, who of course learnt what had happened at breakfast, cantered over at her usual hour to the Hall to enquire after its master. Her father came down to see her as soon as she arrived, and said:

"My dear girl, it's all but over; poor Ralph Enderby will never speak to us more, nor, I fear, recognize any one of us again."

The girl burst out crying, for she had grown fond of the sick man, in a way. There was his evident partiality for herself, and then again, was he not Harold's father? Although ill and requiring careful nursing, she had never recognized that Ralph Sedbergh was in danger; her father had concealed his anxiety on that point, indeed, had tried hard not to admit it to himself, and she saw more than ever now the responsibility she incurred by keeping the secret of this packet for a twelvemonth. She resolved to wait and ride home with her father. Slowly the morning dragged away, but, absorbed in her own thoughts, she scarce took note of the passing hours. Suddenly her father entered the room.

"Bessie," he said softly, "poor Sedbergh has a gleam of returning consciousness; he evidently recognizes us, has murmured your name and looked anxiously round for you,

No, it's no favourable symptom, it is but the last flicker of the candle, but, if you think you can control your feelings, it might soften his last moments just to see you for a minute or two at his bedside."

"You can trust me," replied the girl, as she rose and followed her father to Ralph Sedbergh's chamber.

A gleam of recognition flashed across the dying man's face as his eyes fell upon Bessie, he made an inarticulate attempt to speak, raised his hands as if about to emphasize what he was about to say, and in the midst of the incompleted gesture, a shudder ran through his frame, and the spirit of the Lord of Enderby had fled. Bessie alone understood the dead man's unfinished gesture, and guessed the word he had striven so hard to say. As her father led her from the room she knew that Ralph Sedbergh's lips had striven to utter "Remember" and that he would fain have placed his finger upon them, to emphasize the word.

CHAPTER XII.

THE READING OF THE WILL.

THE match once finished, Harold lost no time in hunting up his uncle Aleck, and told him at once that he was quite willing to begin any manner of work that he could obtain for him.

"Now," returned that gentleman, "if you really mean business, I've got an opening for you in my own line. It's not a very big salary as yet, but there are hundreds of young men who would jump at such an opening, for in journalism, like all other professions, a man doesn't begin at the top, and it rests with himself to show what he's worth in the market."

"My dear uncle Aleck," replied Harold, "I'm only too willing to do my best at this or anything else; that awful question you put to me the other day of, 'what can you do?' has effectually knocked all the conceit out of me."

"Well, you might reply, you know, 'Run a hundred and fifty yards rather tidily,' but a professional pedestrian is a

little *infra dig.* for a Sedbergh. Still, it so happens your athletic proclivities may stand you in good stead. There's a daily paper of very good standing, that, though not a sporting journal, makes rather a feature of having all that sort of thing very well reported. But remember, they want it done in a high tone, and with no more of the *argot* than is absolutely necessary. You will simply have to go where they send you, and describe what you see, and if, as I said before, your salary is small in the first instance, it depends upon yourself to double it in a very short time."

Harold warmly thanked his uncle, and set to work in the interest of *The Guiding Star* forthwith. He worked hard and conscientiously, and having had the advantages of a University education, soon found that he could satisfy his employers by writing animated descriptions of the different sporting events he was sent to witness. The employment was good for him, and it was with a feeling of great satisfaction that he found he was at last independent of his father, and could earn his own living. True, he must live in a very different fashion to what he had hitherto done, and must make his earnings go as far as possible, while, as to when that income would expand to an extent capable of maintaining two, seemed at present a very far-off event, and involved in a dim futurity.

Suddenly burst upon Harold, like a thunderclap, the news of his father's illness and death. He was strangely moved by the intelligence, and deeply regretted that their final parting should have been with bitter anger on both sides. He supposed he ought to have been more patient, and remembered that after all it was his father who spoke, still he was conscious of having been treated with great injustice, and, about that matter of the entail, considered that he had been brought up in most unjust ignorance.

He travelled down to Enderby with his two uncles, both of whom were as much shocked and surprised as himself. They had seen nothing of Ralph for some years. The Hall offered few attractions; they were both confirmed Londoners, the one from his avocations, and the other too wedded to club-land and Pall Mall to ever leave the Metropolis except under peremptory orders from his medical adviser.

"Dooce of a go this ! Poor Ralph ! it's quite upset me I declare. When you've gout in the family, it's no use denying the fact. Poor fellow ! Amongst all his cranks and fancies, the oddest was that he was to escape the hereditary curse, and now by Jove ! it's killed him."

"Yes," replied Aleck, "no Sedbergh can expect to escape. Even you, Harold, will come to the family inheritance in time," and then uncle Aleck mentally cursed his imprudent tongue, as he remembered that it was more than probable that when they came to read the dead man's will, it might turn out that that was the sum total of poor Harold's inheritance. He, as we know, was aware of the unfortunate terms on which the young man had parted from his father, and, though hoping for the best, thought it exceedingly likely that his crotchety, eccentric brother had made a very unjust disposition of his property. As for Captain John, although perfectly aware that Ralph could leave it to whom he liked, it never occurred to him that Enderby would go to anybody else than the legitimate heir. With him, this was nothing more than a sad and conventional ceremony. The world expects us to attend the obsequies of our near relations, but there had been no such deep affection between him and Ralph that he could affect to be deeply cut up at his unexpected decease. It might be doubted now-a-days whether Captain John indeed had strong sympathies for anyone. On arrival at the Hall, they found that all preparations for the funeral had been made by Mr. Greenwood. That gentleman, finding Captain John and his brother were anxious to return to London as soon as possible, suggested that the will should be read immediately after the funeral, and, with a view to that end, accordingly, Ralph Sedbergh having been laid to rest in the tomb of his ancestors, the mourners assembled in the dining-room for this latter ceremony.

Mr. Greenwood produced the will, which was dated some two months back, and was as brief as legal technicalities would allow, whereby the testator, in consequence of the complete defiance of his wishes and commands by his son Harold, bequeathed Enderby Manor, together with the Hall, furniture, plate, carriages and all other personalty, to his brother Captain John Sedbergh, without reserve.

"Damnation!" exclaimed the astonished inheritor, and it may be hoped that upon this occasion the profanity was not registered against him. "It's infamous, that's what it is. Poor old Ralph must have been off his head when he made such a last will and testament as that, and what in Heaven's name," he continued, turning on the attorney, "were you about, sir, to write down such ridiculous rubbish?"

"Mr. Ralph Sedbergh's head was as clear as my own," rejoined Mr. Greenwood icily, "when he instructed me about that will, and my late client was not at all in the habit of asking for advice about the management of his affairs."

"It's perfectly absurd," said Captain John angrily. "Nothing can persuade me that Ralph didn't mean that the youngster there should follow him at Enderby Hall when he was gone."

"My dear uncle," interposed Harold, "it's very kind of you to say this, but Mr. Greenwood has made no mistake about my father's intentions. We quarrelled last spring, because I would not promise to comply with his peremptory commands on a matter of much importance to me. I did not know," he continued with a bitter smile, "that Enderby was at his entire disposal, but Mr. Penge enlightened me a few weeks later."

"You're right, John!" said Aleck Sedbergh. "It is not a just will, but for all that I have no doubt it accurately represents poor Ralph's intentions."

"It's a perfectly good will," interposed the solicitor, who was still on his mettle at the attack made on him by Captain John. "Mr. Ralph Sedbergh was as perfectly capable of making a will or transacting business as he ever was in his life. That a man is queer tempered and disposes of his property in an unexpected way does not suffice to invalidate his will."

"Nobody is suggesting anything of the kind!" exclaimed Harold a little sharply.

"Excuse me," replied Mr. Greenwood somewhat hotly, "that is just what Captain Sedbergh is suggesting."

"I have one suggestion to make, sir," cried Captain John, with the family temper now at its highest within him.

"This house according to your own shewing is mine, and the performance of your duties being now over, I see nothing further to detain you."

Mr. Greenwood sprang sharply to his feet, and his pale face flushed as he retorted, "My late client at all events knew how to behave to a professional man, which is more than I can say of his successor."

"Don't know how to treat an attorney?" roared the now infuriated Captain, springing to his feet. "By Gad! you shall see, sir," and if it hadn't been for the prompt interposition of his brother and nephew, the Captain would have conducted the solicitor's exit in such high-handed fashion as would inevitably have entailed an action for assault and battery.

Doctor Radley when, later on, he came to hear an account of the reading of the will, never could help regretting that a professional call prevented his being present at such a grand illustration of the family failing.

If Captain John had pronounced himself upset by his brother's sudden death, he really was upset in good earnest now. The coming into Enderby was as unwelcome as it was unexpected. An indolent and rather selfish man, living in a somewhat narrow circle, he had a strong sense of right and wrong according to his lights, and he considered Harold to have been most unjustly dealt with; gambling, no doubt, was the offence which his father had deemed so unpardonable, but to leave his only son positively penniless because he, yielding to temptation, had indulged in one of the popular vices of the day, was punishment out of all proportion to the offence. Ralph might have recollected that he had succumbed to a like weakness in his younger days. Surely he couldn't have forgotten the row he had had with his father about the very same thing—true he'd had some years to testify he had done with such follies before the sceptre of Enderby fell vacant, but his sire had left Ralph the property unconditionally, although it had been quite as much in his power to deal with as he liked, as it had been with the latter. "Confound it," he said, as he paced the platform of the Junction with his brother on their way back to Town, "I don't want the property, I wish Ralph had never left it to me. I'm like a fish out of water

out of London. I've a good mind to hand the whole thing over to Harold."

"You can't quite do that," returned Aleck. "A will's a will, and I doubt if Harold would accept that solution of the difficulty."

"Nobody will do what I want 'em," growled the Captain testily.

"Nonsense, John, it might have been a deal worse. In his wrath Ralph might have left the property to a stranger, as it is, you can put things straight if you like. There's no reason you shouldn't make Harold a decent allowance, and remember you can leave Enderby to whom you like."

"You've hit it," replied the Captain, brightening up; "the very thing. What a head you have, Aleck. Of course—I'll put Harold down here, and make him a handsome allowance to keep up the Hall and manage the property."

"Excellent," rejoined his brother, "give him something to do and keep him out of mischief."

Now all this seemed to Aleck Sedbergh a most satisfactory arrangement, but he had quite forgotten one thing, namely, that the rupture between Harold and his father had been not on account of the former's gambling, but on account of his strongly expressed determination to marry Bessie Radley, and that his brother John had no idea that Harold had contemplated anything of that kind, but believed him to be disinherited solely on the former account. Aleck had told his nephew at the time that he could hardly expect his father's approval of such a marriage, that he would naturally expect a daughter-in-law who would bring money to prop up an estate much deteriorated in value. But in the notoriety Harold had obtained for himself by the match, Aleck Sedbergh had quite lost sight of the prime cause of the quarrel. It had never occurred to him that when this determination of Harold's was announced, as sooner or later it must be, to Captain John, that he might have not only a strong opinion on the subject, but perhaps a prejudice against it as violent as poor Ralph's, and further that Harold was no more likely to give in to his uncle on this point than he had been to his father. However, for the present, Aleck Sedbergh was

blind to all this, and simply extremely pleased at the way his brother had behaved over the whole affair.

But this was exactly the view Harold took of the question as soon as he heard of Captain John's proposal. He said that he was now in a fair way to earn his own living. He was not making very much at present, but there was no reason, if he stuck to his work, that he shouldn't make a fair income in the future. That it was very kind of his uncle to make him that offer, but—and there was a big “but” in it—it was only fair to say that he was engaged to a young lady, and was determined to stick to that engagement come what might. That had been the real cause of his quarrel with his father, and it was quite likely that his uncle might equally disapprove of such a marriage. Then, of course, came the disclosure of the lady's name, and the Captain was found to be quite as hostile to such a marriage as Ralph Sedbergh himself.

“Gad! you know, Aleck,” he said, “it's all nonsense. A young fellow like Harold owes something to his family. It's all very well his falling in love with the first pretty face he comes across, but when it comes to marrying, a Sedbergh—especially nowadays—is bound to go in for money and connection. We've been going rather down-hill of late; it was all very well to muddle along as Ralph did, seeing nobody, but that's not the way Enderby ought to be kept up. I want to see it, or at all events hear of it, full of company—its stables full of horses—and Harold hand and glove with all the best people in the county. He ought to consider all these things. By Jove! if he won't I'll wash my hands of him.”

“I agree with you, John,” said the other, “an injudicious engagement. “She's a pretty girl and a good girl.”

“But d—— it all, she's the daughter of a country doctor,” interposed the choleric Captain. “Ralph wouldn't give his consent to it, no more will I.” And really, from the violent manner in which the Captain finished his speech and dashed his fist upon the table, one might have thought for a moment that country doctors were social pariahs.

Now one curious trait of the family complaint was that it was highly provocative of a contradictory spirit. Aleck Sedbergh, in the first instance, had taken very much Ralph's

view of his nephew's engagement, but now that he found John had violently adopted the same opinion, he turned round and felt inclined to back up the delinquent.

"Don't forget Harold's got quite his share of the family temper," he observed a little testily.

"The Sedberghs, *as a rule*, are not given to changing their mind; I should have thought our opinion would have been one in this matter. At all events I shall show the family firmness about it."

"Family obstinacy," retorted Aleck sharply.

"That is my affair, and nobody else's; we'd better give up discussing it," said the Captain, tingling to the very tips of his fingers with indignation. "I should know what I think right."

"And which everybody else will think wrong," retorted Aleck Sedbergh, now nearly as angry as his brother, but he just retained enough self-possession to see that he and John were on the verge of a violent quarrel, and as he did not wish this, he bade him an abrupt good-bye, and hastily left his brother's rooms, where the above conversation had taken place.

"Poor Harold," he muttered, as he gained the street, "he's pretty much as his father left him—as far off the property as ever. John *may* change his mind, but obstinacy is one of the family attributes."

CHAPTER XIII.

"A SINISTER RUMOUR."

IT was of course known now to all Kilmington that Captain John Sedbergh had inherited Enderby Manor. How it had all come about the good people of the little country town did not quite understand. They probably had not thought very much about it, for still had always supposed that Harold would succeed his father at the Hall, and how it came about that Captain John was now its legal lord puzzled them a good deal. Their notions of the law of entail were for the most part hazy, but that landed property went from father to son was a fixed belief with most of them.

The Doctor had not heard that account of the reading of the will at this time, and still less would he have laughed at it if he had; but he knew the state of affairs, and could quite understand how John Sedbergh had become master of Enderby. He was very sorry for Harold, not at all on account of his daughter, for he had some doubts as to whether a marriage was a thing to be desired between those two. It was not so much the insufficiency of means that he dreaded, but he had lingering misgivings that Harold had imbibed a taste for betting and high play, which was apt to render no income sufficient. Still, it was hard upon a young man to be deprived of his inheritance for what might turn out, after all, to be but the folly of youth. Bessie had kept her last letter to herself, it must be remembered, and Doctor Radley, though he had stood up for Harold in that brief conversation he had had concerning him with the Squire, like all the world, believed him to have won a large sum of money over the match.

Harold meanwhile stuck manfully to his work in a way that astonished his Uncle Aleck, and only confirmed Captain John's opinion of his nephew's obstinate disposition. The Captain, indeed, was sorely troubled with his new position as head of the family. An indolent man about

Town, without a care in the world, save when afflicted by the family complaint, he had hitherto left all management of his affairs to his bankers, or, on such rare occasions as it became necessary, to Messrs. Penge and Carboy. If he had not a large income it amply sufficed for his wants, and now he declared he was worried to death in the management of a good-sized landed property. In consequence of what he denominated Harold's pigheadedness, he had been compelled to appoint an agent to look after the estate, and he declared that the local man he had appointed bothered his life out about renewal of leases, putting up new buildings for the tenants, and all sorts of suggestions for the improvement of the property, till the irritable Captain declared he had never had a moment's peace since he came into it. It was hard upon a man at his time of life to be nearly driven mad by the preposterous will of a still more preposterous brother—that he only wished Enderby was at Jericho, that it really was hard lines that a quiet man like himself should be mixed up in a family quarrel. And here the Captain's language was wont to get so very pronounced that even his cronies wondered at his audacity in laying claim to a pacific disposition. These intimate friends, too—as intimate friends will do sometimes—added not a little to his discomfort. They told him he would have to marry now, and, worse still, several matrons of his acquaintance, mothers of eligible daughters who were past their first youth, began to shower invitations upon the master of Enderby. A well-preserved man of middle age, hale and hearty, barring the gout, possessed of a nice place in the country and a very fair income to keep it up, many of these ladies thought it would be good that Captain Sedbergh should marry, and were certain that they could find him a perfectly suitable wife.

Captain John, though he had never been married, was quite as averse to matrimony as Mr. Weller, senior, after trying the experiment; so that, all things considered, the new lord of Enderby was not exactly enjoying his inheritance. He had himself to thank for some of his troubles, for had he not quarrelled with Mr. Greenwood, that gentleman, who knew every rood of the property, would naturally have become his temporary steward. As it was,

the new agent had continually to apply to the Captain for information on many points.

Thanks to the crotchety disposition of the family, the succession of Enderby at the present moment resembled the famous situation of the *Critic*. There was the present lord of the soil anxious to do what he considered the right thing, and restore his inheritance to the rightful heir, but then it must be upon his own conditions. There was Aleck Sedbergh, afraid to tender advice on either side, for fear of precipitating a quarrel which he was anxious to avoid, and there was Harold, resolute to marry Bessie Radley in defiance of the wishes of every one, unless perhaps those of the young lady herself. And not one of them with the slightest intention of budging from the position he had taken up.

But though all readjustment of Ralph Sedbergh's mistaken will was at a standstill, Harold was shewing a dogged perseverance in the calling of his adoption. He had thrown up his rooms in the West End, and now occupied modest chambers in the neighbourhood of the Savoy, which were handy to his work and more suited to his means. His clubs knew him no more, and he had discovered it was possible to dine sufficiently for eighteenpence, in the purlieus of Fleet Street. He not only liked his work, but did it well; it took him out of himself and amused him. He was continually sent to one place or another to see and report upon some event of the day—in short, he was doing descriptive reporting, though for the most part of a sporting tendency. As he was very fairly paid, to say nothing of a very reasonable margin for expenses, Harold was doing well, and it may be questioned whether he had not been a more impecunious man in his former life than his present.

In all the fervour of his passion for Bessie, and in his stubborn determination to achieve such an income as would enable him to marry, he cut down the expenses of those excursions on which he was constantly despatched to the minimum, and so added in some measure to his slender savings. Obstinacy, in the form of tenacity of purpose, becomes a virtue, and it is that bull-dog strain in our Anglo-Saxon blood which has pulled us through in many a hard-fought field.

Bessie Radley, too, was also much exercised in her mind at this time. She of course knew now, like everyone else, that John Sedbergh had succeeded to Enderby, and she further knew from her father that Ralph had always possessed the power to leave the property to whom he liked. Now this packet, which she had promised to keep and say nothing about till the following year, in all likelihood made a considerable difference to Harold. It was probably, she thought, a fresh will revoking that unjust one which had been produced by Mr. Greenwood; but then why was a twelvemonth to elapse before she was allowed to produce it? She remembered to have read or heard that once in possession of a property, the difficulty of ousting the assumed proprietor was very considerable. If this was so, then every week she kept this paper to herself she would be increasing the difficulties Harold would have in recovering the estate which should have been his. She hardly recollected Captain John Sedbergh, but she had always heard of him as a passionate, violent man, like all the Sedberghs, one who might be expected to fight to the last for his rights, and little likely to give up the lands of Enderby without a bitter fight. She didn't know much about these things, but she did know that in a legal contest of this nature a long purse was an essential, and where was poor Harold to look for money? She got occasional letters from him, knew what he was doing, and how he was earning his living; had, indeed, read some of his articles and thought them amazingly clever, more so, I am afraid, than the general public considered them. Still, if he does not succeed in the eyes of his sweetheart, where is the 'prentice penman to look for admiration? Still, if this time next year Harold was battling for his rights, where were the sinews of war to come from? and if her persistent silence had thrown still further difficulties in their recovery she should take much blame to herself. But then there was the solemn promise she had given the dead man, and he might have had very good and sufficient reasons for exacting it. She had asked her father if there was any chance of the will Mr. Greenwood had produced being disputed, and he had replied promptly:

'Not the slightest; Harold wouldn't have a leg to stand

upon. Ralph Sedbergh's head, till within a few hours of his death, was as clear as ever. In any such case I should be a principal witness, and I reluctantly admit that my evidence would go clean against him."

Upon further questioning her father as to what terms Captain John and his nephew were upon, the doctor replied, laughing:

"Upon my word I don't know; it depends chiefly I should think, on whether they've met lately. The Sedberghs never did get on together, and invariably quarrelled if they came to see much of each other."

But John Sedbergh had not yet come to the end of the worries incidental to his new position. Gradually a rumour spread about Kilmington that Captain John's tenure of Enderby was precarious; that he had come into it by an accident; that the will under which he had inherited it was only one which Ralph Sedbergh had made in a moment of passion. That such a crotchety man as he was was likely enough to have left two or three documents of that description; that it was very doubtful whether the one which had been proved was the last will he had made, and nothing was more likely than that one of later date would be discovered sooner or later. This rumour had originated with Mr. Greenwood, although he had no intention of setting such a report afloat, when he gave utterance to the remark that first produced it. As Carlyle says: "The first utterer of a lie can never foresee what dimensions it may attain." Each endorser thereof usually embellishing it more or less on his own account. The attorney was furious at the way in which he had been treated by John Sedbergh; the Captain had not only theoretically kicked him out of his house, but had only been restrained from practically doing so by his brother and nephew. Mr. Greenwood had for some years acted as steward of the Enderby property and not only enjoyed a snug little yearly salary, but various pickings and considerable patronage. The attorney had been very sore at all this being taken away from him; he had said at the reading of the will that it was as valid an instrument as a lawyer could draw, and that Ralph Sedbergh was perfectly competent to give his instructions on the subject. He honestly

believed that it was so, and professional pride naturally made him stand up for a will of his own preparing. He was a vindictive man, and after the turn things had taken, only devoutly wished there was any prospect of its being set aside, and in a moment of ungovernable spitefulness he had so far forgotten the reticence of his calling as to say it was not improbable that so passionate and eccentric a man as Ralph Enderby might have left behind him more wills than one.

The rumour grew apace, and it was now confidently stated in Kilmington that there *was* another will. That it had been found, that it had been destroyed; that, far from being owner of Enderby, John Sedbergh ought to be expiating the offence of felony in one of Her Majesty's gaols. Others pooh-poohed this as all nonsense, but declared that such a will existed, though it had not yet been discovered; there were those who had seen it; there were witnesses to the dead man's signature, but here the story again fell a little to pieces, as nobody could say who these witnesses might be; and to tell the truth this was the very point which puzzled Bessie. She had learnt that witnesses to the testator's signature were necessary in an instrument of this description. If then this packet he had entrusted to her contained a will, how was it these witnesses did not come forward and tender their evidence? Be that as it might, it was quite certain that nobody volunteered to do anything of the kind.

In due course his agent thought proper to acquaint Captain John of this report, which at once aroused all the combative powers of his nature. He declared he would contest the property to the very last extremity. A good healthy quarrel had been always a luxury to a Sedbergh, and the Captain was positively "spoiling for a fight." He gave instructions to Penge and Carboy to direct his agent to at once furnish him with the name of the offender, vowed he would make a terrible example of him, and then found that all his warlike preparations had been wasted upon an intangible opponent. It was irritating in the extreme to lie under a shadowy threat that you would be ejected from your own lands, without being able to arrive at who disputed your title to them—it would have been trying

to most men, but more especially to one of the Captain's temperament.

It was no use that Penge and Carboy, after inquiring into the matter, exhorted him to take no heed of the idle gossip of a country town. Captain John was plunged into a state of chronic irritability, and chafed continually at this invisible foe with whom there was no possibility of grappling. If Ralph Sedbergh had made a queer will, and set everybody connected with him by the ears, the Captain's intimates opined that no last testament of his would have a soothing effect on the family, while old Billy Pouncett went the length of predicting that if this rumour about the disputed succession of the Enderby property really came to anything, it would worry John Sedbergh either into his grave or a lunatic asylum.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE OPENING OF THE PACKET."

THE months slipped gradually away without producing more amicable relations between the members of that very eccentric race the Sedberghs. Captain John fumed and fidgetted himself into more than one fit of the gout because he could not ascertain the name of this pretender to his estates. He told his intimates that he was cursed with the most hopeless idiot as a steward in the United Kingdom, and upon its being suggested that perhaps in that case it would be advisable to change him, he said, in his usual vehement fashion, that there never was such a congregation of fools as had got together in this town of Kilmington. And yet it was the tittle-tattle of these foolish people that was driving him well nigh mad. He harried his unfortunate agent to death by continuous and peremptory demands for the name of this impostor who claimed Enderby. Deeply did the poor man regret that he had ever told his employer that such a report was flying about. He could give the angry Captain no answer on this point. Who could it be? It could only be Harold—and John Sedbergh vowed that he would spend his last shilling before he would surrender the lands of Enderby to his nephew. He had only been too willing to restore them in part at once, and in total at his death, on a very fair and reasonable concession. But yield to force? No, not while he'd breath in his body, or a cent in his pocket. True, Penge and Carboy told him there was not the slightest sign that Harold—or indeed anyone else—had any design of disputing the possession of Enderby with him. Nonsense, if there was not some fraudulent scoundrel in the background, how was it that this rumour persistently held its ground? No—Harold it must be, and under this impression Captain John felt more angry with his nephew than ever, and equally ill-disposed towards Aleck for shewing a disposition to take Harold's part,

Now a rumour of this sort is usually a nine days' wonder in most communities, and so it would doubtless have been in Kilmington, if it had not been for the malicious mutterings of Mr. Greenwood. The vindictive attorney had learnt that John Sedbergh was seriously disturbed on hearing of such a report in the air, and took considerable pains to keep it alive, with a view of punishing the Captain for his ill-treatment of himself. It is notorious that men have bragged of fictitious deeds of derring-do till they have actually believed they were the veritable heroes of the exploits they had originally claimed for themselves in a freak of mental jest and vanity. George IV. is said at last to have really believed that he played a prominent part at Waterloo. In the same way a base lie may be told so continuously that the utterer at last believes there is some truth in it; and by the spring of the year succeeding Ralph Sedbergh's death, Mr. Greenwood had actually convinced himself of the likelihood of his random surmise. The wish, no doubt, was father to the thought, for, to avenge himself on John Sedbergh, the attorney would willingly have given his professional services gratuitously to any one contesting Enderby with him.

As the year wore on, and the early green of the trees was fast merging into the full foliage of summer, Bessie began to get tremendously excited about the packet in her keeping. Often as Kilmington gossips proclaimed the fact that another will was in existence, nobody ever could pin them to that one point. If there was such a will where did they suppose it to be? To that question, let the propagator of the story be who it might, there was no getting a straightforward reply. The speaker "didn't know—but there was them as did," or, more oracularly, "Never you mind, they're just biding their time." But still the whole rumour was as vague as ever, and Bessie felt convinced that if the packet in her keeping did not contain a will, then Ralph Sedbergh had left no further deed of that description behind him. The fifteenth of July—a bare month now, and the day appointed for the opening of that packet will have arrived. She had heard occasionally from Harold all this time, short, though cheery letters. He was doing well, and absorbed in his calling—but one thing noticeable in them was that he

never made the slightest allusion to Enderby nor the surrounding neighbourhood. It seemed as if he had entirely broken with his past life, and all his old home surroundings. Bessie felt grieved at this, for she thoroughly understood how bitter his feelings must be at the cruel alienation of his heritage, and her heart thrilled with exultation at the thought that next month she might place in his hands a paper which would restore to him the home of his ancestors. To Captain John Sedbergh she had conceived a great dislike, mingled with contempt. She looked upon him as a greedy, grasping old curmudgeon, who had only been too glad to take advantage of the opportunity his brother's unjust will had given him, and to have behaved with unexampled meanness to Harold since he had come into the property. She was quite unaware of the liberal proposals Captain John had made in the first instance, though, saddled with the condition they were, they might not have seemed so liberal in her eyes, even had she known of them. All she did know was that Harold had declined to accept all assistance from his uncle, and was now trusting to his own brains for a living.

How slowly those last three or four weeks seemed to pass. Never before in all Bessie's life had the days seemed so long and so tiresome; she was wild to place that packet in Harold's hands. At last came the *thirteenth of July*, and, as it dragged its tedious length away, it suddenly flashed upon the girl that the day after to-morrow she was pledged to give this packet into Harold's own hands. How could she do that if she were in Kilmington and he in London? She could not go there without an explanation to her father and mother, and she had promised that no one should know of the existence of that packet till the day appointed by Ralph Sedbergh. The mouse could not go to the lion, the lion must come to the mouse, and Bessie accordingly wrote to her lover to say that he must be at Kilmington on the fifteenth. "It is no idle whim," she said, "believe me, Harold. Although you must know I'm longing to see you again, dearest, it is not that; I could wait patiently till you could snatch a day or two from the career you have chosen and in which I know you are succeeding. But, Harold, I believe this to be a

matter of grave importance to you, and I can only fulfil the trust I have undertaken by seeing you. I can tell you no more, for I am pledged to secrecy for another forty-eight hours ; but don't fail me, Harold. Come, my darling, on the day I have named, and if my hopes are only realised, no happier girl will lay her head on the pillow that night than,

“Your own BESSIE.”

Harold Sedbergh wondered very much what had happened when he received that letter, but he had a very high opinion of his *fiancée's* common sense, and felt sure that she would never have sent for him without good cause. He made arrangements for some of his colleagues to do his work for him in his brief absence, and started for Kilmington by an early train on the morning of the fifteenth. Immediately after breakfast on that day, Bessie produced the packet and told her story to her father. The doctor got extremely excited over it, and his curiosity to know its contents ran pretty well as high as Bessie's ; but the gratification of that must necessarily await Harold's arrival. He fully agreed with his daughter that the packet contained a later will, and pointed out, in answer to Bessie's surprise that the witnesses to Ralph Sedbergh's signature had not come forward and volunteered their evidence on the subject, that there was no reason why they should. The first will, you see, was never disputed, and for all they knew that was the will the signature of which they had witnessed.

“Besides,” he continued, “much as I should like to see Harold come into what should be his own, we mustn't be too sanguine. Good man of business though Ralph Sedbergh was, we must remember he was very ill, and even if it is a will, it may be unsigned or unwitnessed, or want something very essential to make it of any legal value.”

At length Harold Sedbergh made his appearance, and in spite of some seeming coyness on the part of his *fiancée*, kissed her with the utmost effrontery.

“It's no use, doctor,” he said, as he shook hands with Mrs. Radley, “you'll have to give her me as soon as I've a

home to take her to, for I won't marry anybody else, and you can't condemn me to remain single all my life."

The doctor, indeed, had considerably changed his mind on the subject. The situation was entirely changed; nobody could accuse him now of endeavouring to entrap a wealthy husband for his daughter; then he had of late discovered how very deeply Bessie's affections were committed to Harold's keeping. And finally, the latter had buckled to hard work in a resolute fashion, and, as far as he could learn, had completely given up gambling. Indeed, he only wanted to be thoroughly convinced on this point to give a full and willing consent to the marriage, conscious as he was that he could give more help to the young couple than the world generally would give him credit for.

And now Bessie produced the packet—told how she had received it, how she had pledged herself to keep it secret, and how she now finally discharged her trust and handed it over to its lawful owner. Harold was certainly filled with amazement. He had looked on all connected with Enderby as completely finished as far as he was concerned; that the question of the succession was completely settled for many years, and that, even on the death of his uncle, it was never likely to make any difference to him. He tore open the packet—a slight exclamation of surprise escaped him as he mastered the contents, and when he had finished he turned to Bessie with a smile, and exclaimed:

"Miss Radley, you're an heiress, though sad to say my poor father's bequest is clogged with an encumbrance."

"Let me see," cried the doctor, "let me read it out for the benefit of the community. "Ah, I see," he continued, "a will, as we expected." And then he proceeded to read out the last testament of Ralph Sedbergh; which, after a preamble, in which he stated his firm conviction that nothing steadied a young man more than being wedded to a good woman, and said that his own happiest days had been those of his married life, he went on to say that if anything could steady Harold's flighty, unstable disposition, it would be marriage with a good sensible girl. That he had chosen to fall in love with Miss Radley, and had refused to give her up at his bidding, which at the time he had considered nothing but contumacious obstinacy on his

part, but upon coming later to know Bessie Radley well, he had come to the conclusion that his son was gifted with much more common-sense than he had heretofore given him credit for. And that upon recognition of that fact, he hereby revoked all former wills, and hereby bequeathed Enderby Manor, with the Hall, plate, furniture, and all other appanages, to Elizabeth Catherine Radley, upon her marriage with his son, Harold Sedbergh. But that in the event of the same Harold Sedbergh, or the same Elizabeth Catherine Radley declining to fulfil such arrangement, then the property was to go as before to his brother, Captain John Sedbergh, subject only to a legacy of five thousand pounds to the said Elizabeth Catherine Radley.

Signed,

RALPH SEDBERGH.

Witnessed Robert Griffin—Clara Thompson.

“Oh, Harold!” exclaimed Bessie. “I am so glad Enderby is yours after all.”

“But that’s just what it isn’t,” he replied, with a mock gravity, which the laughter in his eyes utterly contradicted. “It belongs to Miss Elizabeth Catherine Radley, and Miss Radley, the heiress, may not be of the same mind as Miss Radley, the doctor’s daughter.”

“Ah, Harold! you know better than that, dearest” and Bessie looked up into his face with such entire love and confidence as made the ultimate disposition of Enderby tolerably clear to everyone present.

“And suppose that high-minded young man, Harold Sedbergh, should disdain to make a mercenary marriage?”

“He would be like a Sedbergh all over,” chimed in the doctor.

And then the whole party burst into a ripple of joyous laughter, as people do when the desire of their hearts is fulfilled.

“As far as my judgment goes,” continued the doctor, “although not couched in strictly legal phraseology, this is a perfectly valid will. As for Griffin, your father’s old butler, he’s at the Hall still, a taciturn man, and devoted to his late master. It’s quite easy to understand that he would take no notice of Kilmington gossip. As for Clara Thomp-

son, I never heard of her, but Griffin could of course tell us all about her."

"I have some idea that there was a housemaid of that name," said Harold. "I recollect being struck by it the last time I was at Enderby as a name not usually associated with her position."

"That would be she, no doubt," said the doctor. "But what will your Uncle John say to this? He has not behaved very well to you, Master Harold."

"No, though in the opinion of most people, he would have been deemed extremely liberal in his offer. He proposed to give up the Hall to me, make me a liberal allowance in consideration of my management of the property, but he saddled it with the same condition that my father sought to impose upon me—that I should give up Bessie."

"Do you mean to say, Harold," cried the girl anxiously, "that it was on my account your father disinherited you?"

Harold nodded assent, and the doctor murmured "Ah! I was afraid that it was so."

"My darling!" cried the girl, as she threw her arms round her lover's neck. "Thank God that your father learnt to love me before he died, and enabled me to restore your rights to you again."

The Doctor and Harold had a long talk that evening, before the latter returned to "The Hoop," where he had engaged a bed for the night. They both agreed that things should be made as easy as possible for John Sedbergh, but it was not to be expected he could be left in quiet possession of the property to which he was not entitled. Besides, as Harold observed, Enderby under this latter will belonged more to Bessie than himself.

"It will make him very angry I am afraid; to do him justice, I don't believe he'll mind giving up Enderby a bit; but what will make him furious will be the having to do it by compulsion, and that the marrying Bessie is the condition by which I step into his shoes."

CONCLUSION.

When the discovery of the contents of the new will were first announced to Captain John by Messrs Penge and Carboy, his state of mind quite equalled his nephew's expectations. He declared he would contest his possession of Enderby to the uttermost. That he would spend every farthing he could wring from the property in maintaining his claims. That if it was wrested from him, that hussy of a doctor's daughter should find that the kernel was gone, and that she had only inherited the husk. He raved about the ingratitude of his nephew ; exclaimed against "that scheming old Radley," who took advantage of his position to introduce his daughter as a quasi-nurse to the sick man's bedside, and how between them they so worked upon his enfeebled brain as to induce him to make this preposterous will in her favour.

In vain did Penge and Carboy, who had seen the later instrument, inform him that he hadn't a leg to stand upon and counselled him, if he would go to law, to at all events, put it to the arbitration of a friendly suit. No, John Sedbergh had nailed his colours to the mast and, sink or swim, was determined on war, war to the last extremity. What was the opinion of Doctor Radley worth about the state of his brother's mind ? His evidence was tainted. He was too much interested on his daughter's account to be worthy of credence ; it was in vain to point out to him that the doctor bore an unblemished reputation. Pooh ! all men were rogues, when a prize like this was at stake. If Messrs. Penge and Carboy did not choose to take up the case, there were no doubt plenty of solicitors who would. In short, to discuss the subject with Captain John in those early days was something like arguing with a north-east wind.

An interview with Griffin made the question of witnesses clear enough. Yes, he had witnessed his master's signature to what he believed to be a will, towards the end of his last illness ; he was quite certain about it, and it would be a week or two before his death. It was the only one he had

witnessed, and he had never heard of any other; Clara Thompson was one of the housemaids, and had witnessed the Squire's signature with him. When Captain John came into the property, he had reduced the establishment, and Clara had been one of those dismissed. She had taken a place, as he understood, somewheres up in the North, he did not know her address himself, but no doubt some of the other servants did, in short there could be very little doubt, as Messrs. Penge and Carboy said, that this lately-found will was substantially good.

"But," continued Mr. Penge, "it would be a thousand pities this case should go into a Court of Law. It's no use blinking the fact that though in my opinion you must eventually get a verdict in your favour, Captain Sedbergh can put you to a great deal of expense and annoyance. Recollect, law is not given away, it's a commodity you pay pretty high for, and if Captain Sedbergh insists in this plea of undue influence on the part of Doctor and Miss Radley, he has the makings of a strong case in his favour. You see Miss Radley benefits under this will in any case; if she doesn't come in for Enderby, which depends upon herself, she does for five thousand pounds, and that's a thing most people would think worth fighting about. Now I am speaking not only in the interests of both sides, but also in the interests of the property. Who is there that Captain Sedbergh is likely to hear reason from?—he won't from us, and it's not likely he will from you. He is hot-tempered and very prejudiced; the best advice I can give you, is, if you can think of any one likely to have influence with Captain Sedbergh, let them talk the matter over."

"The only man I can think of," replied Harold, "is my Uncle Aleck. It's a forlorn chance, but we might try it."

Aleck Sedbergh, upon being appealed to by his nephew to undertake this mission, at first vowed he would have nothing to do with it. No good could come of it, he and John had already nearly quarrelled over the matter, as indeed two Sedberghs were very apt to do in discussing any subject. He admitted however that the new will put the match with Miss Radley in so different a light that objection to it now would be absurd, and ended by consenting to see what he could do. "But remember, Master Harold," he

added, "even if he don't care about the property, no man likes being kicked out of one, and any reasonable concession John may ask, I think you and Miss Radley ought to consent to."

Before starting on his mission, Aleck Sedbergh took a resolute vow to, if possible, control himself. He did not suffer from the hereditary curse of the family so severely as his brothers, and consequently, though peppery enough, was the most even-tempered of that irritable family. He found John, to his great surprise, in a milder mood than he had anticipated, consequent upon his having just got over a sharp attack of his old enemy. At first he obstinately declined to hear of any surrender or compromise. That old scamp Radley, upon finding that he was unable to marry his daughter to the heir of Enderby by fair means, had schemed to accomplish his end, in conjunction with his daughter, by employing the most shameful influence and cajolery over the dying man. It was absurd to suppose that Ralph would have left Enderby to Miss Radley if he had been himself. But here Aleck reminded him that he stood quite alone in his opinion that Ralph was not in full possession of his faculties; that not only Dr. Radley, but Griffin, who had been with him for years, and all those about him, were prepared to testify that the dead man was in full possession of his faculties till within the last few hours. That there was no doubt upon his coming to know Miss Radley, Ralph had completely changed his mind about that young lady, and had come to the conclusion that she would not only make Harold a good wife, but that a good wife was just exactly what Harold needed, to give stability to his character, and that the reason he left such strict injunctions that the second will should be kept a secret for a twelvemonth was to test the strength of the young people's affection.

Had it not been for the beneficial effect produced upon his health, and consequently on his temper, by his last opportune attack, it is very doubtful whether John Sedbergh would have yielded in the slightest degree to his brother's persuasions. But he had not been so well for months, and it is easy to be amiable when you're in good health, even if called upon to the extent of surrendering a property gracefully, which the law threatens to take from

you forcibly. The message too from Harold, that he was prepared to meet his wishes to any reasonable extent, regarding the income derived from Enderby, also gratified Captain John, and he finally promised that there should be no lawsuit.

"Gad," he said "I never wanted the place, and hate the country. Pall Mall's good enough for me. I've pretty well as much money as I want, but if I decide upon taking two or three hundred a year from the property for my life, it won't hurt Harold. The boy's behaved like a gentleman, and—confound it! I'll do the thing handsomely while I'm about it, and give the bride a wedding present."

"Ah!" said the doctor when the news of the amicable settlement which had been arrived at reached him. "It's terrible to think of the discord in families caused by gout. If a timely attack had not relieved John Sedbergh of his irritability it would have occasioned an acrimonious lawsuit, involving bad blood, and a terrible waste of money. Talk about hynoptism—rubbish! Podagra is the cause of half the crime in the country, I believe, and ought to be regarded as "extenuating circumstances" by an intelligent British Jury.

THE END.

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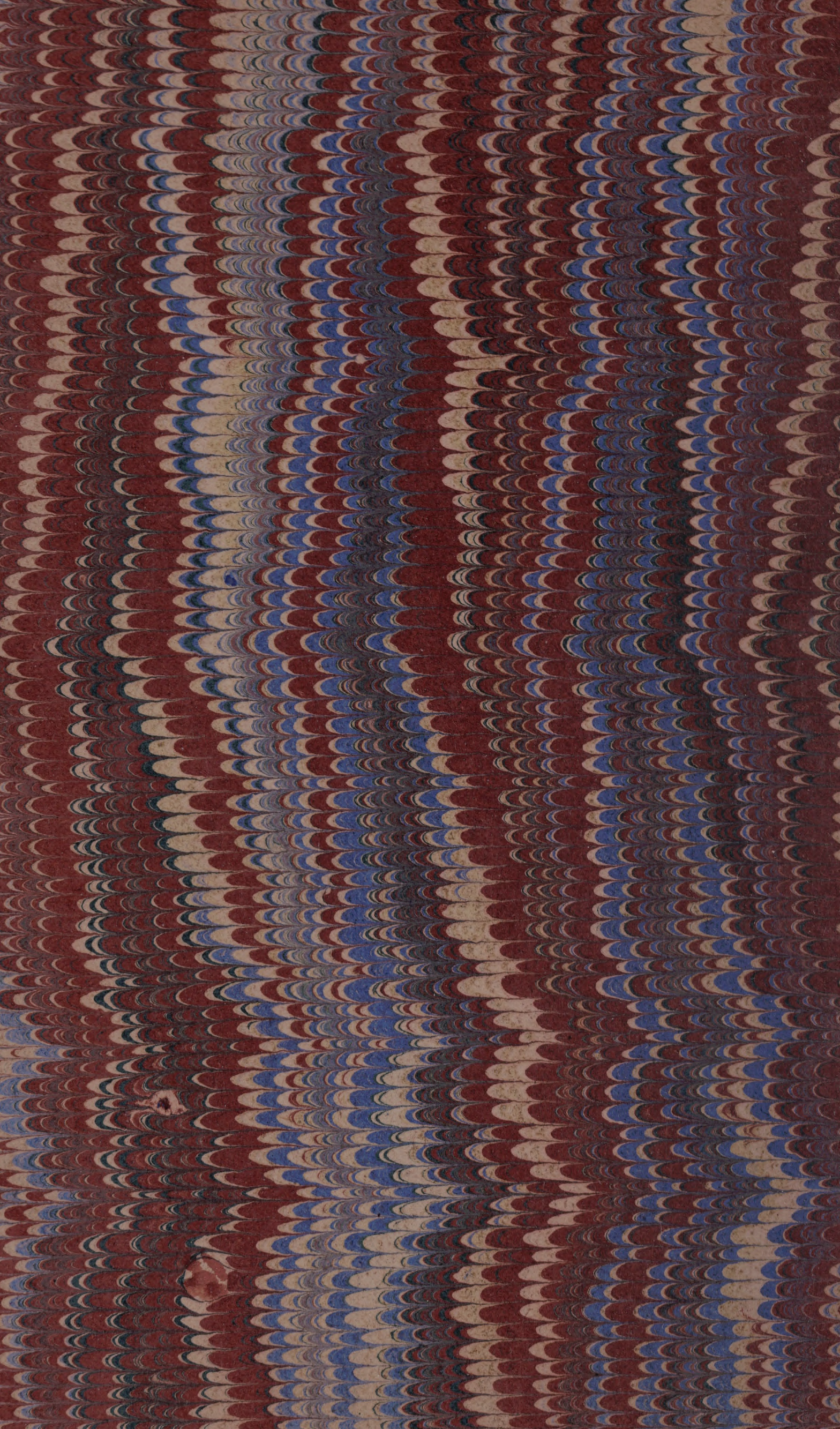
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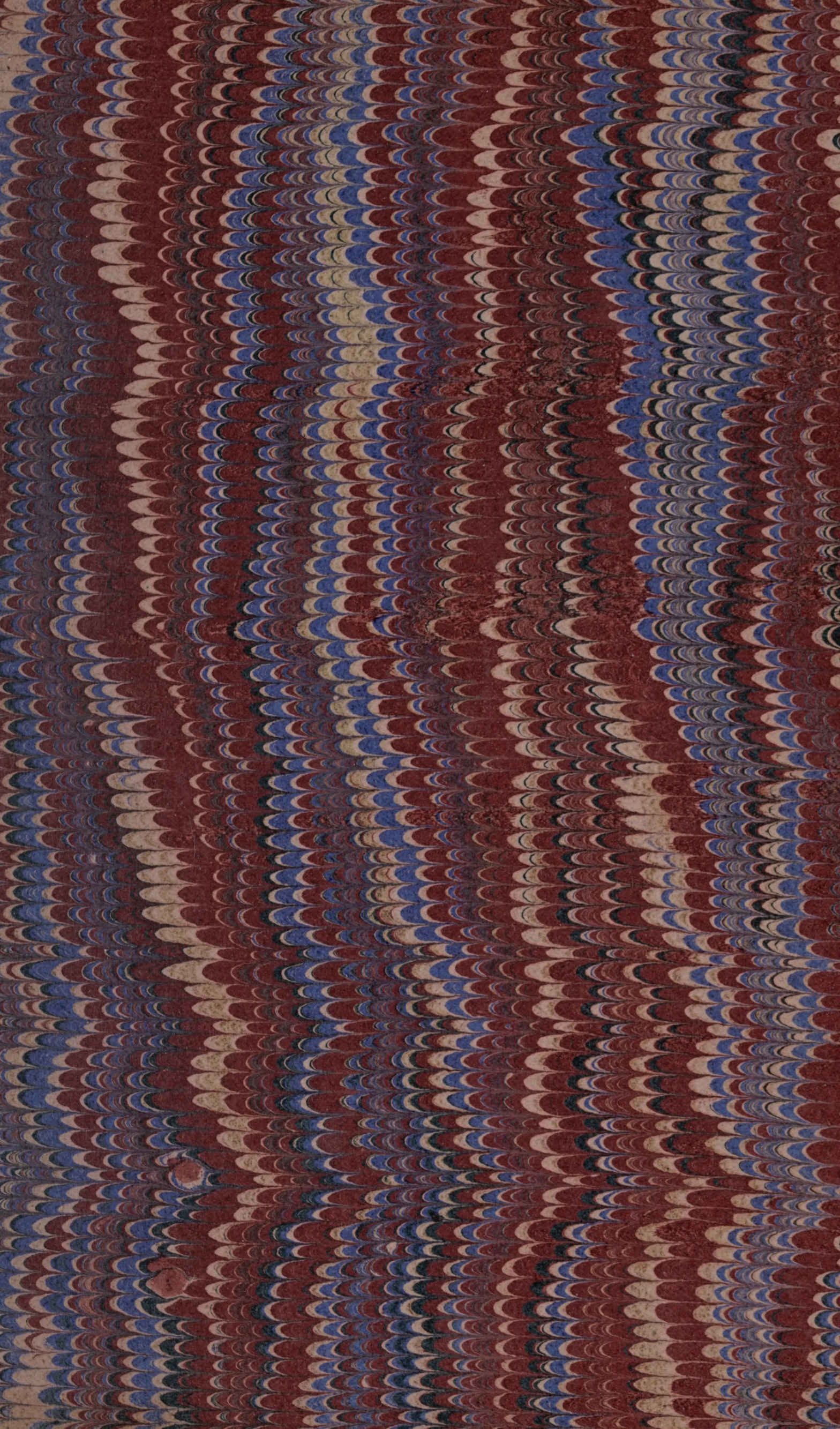
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